Buddhism, Human Rights and Social Renewal

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16 Argyle Street, Kowloon
Hong Kong SAR, China
Telephone: +(852) 2698-6339
Fax: +(852) 2698-6367
E-mail: ahrchk@ahrchk.org
Website: http://www.ahrchk.net

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A Note on Canonical References

Throughout this text, references to the Buddhist canon, the Tipitaka, are contained in parentheses. Among the three Pitakas, or "baskets", the Vinaya Pitaka, the Book of Discipline; and the Sutta Pitaka, the Book of Sayings, were used as sources for this study. The second basket is divided into five Nikayas, or "collections", of *suttas*: the Digha Nikaya, the Long Sayings; the Majjhima Nikaya, the Middle-length Sayings; the Samyutta Nikaya, the Kindred Sayings; the Anguttara Nikaya, the Gradual Sayings; and the Khuddaka Nikaya, the Short Sayings. *Suttas* from the first two collections are most frequently cited in this text. Numerical references and titles correspond to those of the Pali Text Society (London).

Foreword

This text is an elaboration of the keynote address I delivered at a workshop in Colombo, "Buddhism, Human Rights and Social Renewal", organised by the Ecumenical Institute of Colombo and sponsored by the Asian Human Rights Commission.

My address differed somewhat from that which might be expected of a discussion on the Buddha's Teaching in relation to the contemporary discourse on fundamental human rights. My aim was not to provide a comparative study of the Buddha's Teaching and formally codified laws such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. My approach was philosophical rather than juridical – to investigate the philosophical assumptions underlying the Western discourse on human rights: what is the genealogy of the Western discourse on rights? On what basis are some rights regarded as "universal" and "fundamental"? What is the foundation of the "fundament"? From clarifying the premises underpinning Western Philosophy of Right, I proceeded to compare these with the basic principles of the Buddha's Teaching. I adopted this approach in the workshop because the majority of participants were Buddhist. Since the contemporary human rights discourse originated in the West, I considered it necessary to first identify the moorings of the Western discourse on rights in Greek philosophy and Judaeo-Christian theology.

The Buddha declared certain values inviolable by appealing to empirically verifiable facts. He claimed that his Teaching was founded on a Basic Law of universal validity because it transcends particular views and observances, and the vagaries of time and place. This was not an *a-priori* claim to which he demanded acquiescence solely on his teaching authority. It could, he said, be tried and have its validity tested by any intelligent person of goodwill (Majjhima Nikaya I.265). This explains why the Buddha urged his disciples not to be elated when his Teaching was praised, or depressed when it was reviled. Neither his personal prestige nor credibility were at stake if his message was not heeded (Digha Nikaya 1). The Buddha's equanimity in the face of attacks on his Teaching can be explained

through a contemporary example. Madame Curie's creation of the X-ray machine has enabled physicians to diagnose the causes of diseases inside the human organism not visible to the naked eye. This technique is now universally applied, since its validity has stood the test of practice. Madame Curie's personal honour or scientific credentials are not affected if people refuse to make use of her discovery.

The Buddha's Way is the only Teaching to reach us from ancient times that approximates what we today call "scientific method". Centuries before Karl Marx, the Buddha pointed out that debates about the truth or falsehood of propositions independent of practice are purely scholastic preoccupations. The Buddha realised that human physiological processes like breathing and digestion, perception, cognition and deeds that produce external effects are all without exception practical activities, or *sankharas*. The solution to humanity's problems lies in human practice and the right understanding of human practice. This universal principle can be verified in the Saharan desert or the snow-covered Alaskan region. The Buddha's Teaching has a universal validity not because it corresponds to universal ideas conceived by a Creator God or an Absolute Spirit, but because it can be empirically verified by anyone anywhere, irrespective of gender or ethnicity. It is not an 'oriental religion'.

The Buddha's ethical values are not based on a system of rights intrinsic to so-called sovereign individuals, but on compassion towards all sentient beings and awareness that the environment of living beings is not an externality. A person awakening to truly perceive actuality *experiences* that the distinction between 'external' and 'internal' is a delusion and that all life is a pulsating flow, without self-subsistent 'things' or 'beings' in motion. Caught in the web of language, humans break even impersonal events into subject-predicate differences and say, "*it* rains", "*the river* flows". Language reinforces the delusion that the conceptualised world is real, whereas outside the thinking head, the perceived form from which a concept is derived and fixed by a verbal signifier is subject to the law of impermanence and flux. One never steps into the same river twice. It

is human re-cognition that makes it the same river and not an underlying, unchanging essence of 'riverness'.

Given the narcissism attached to the word "I", the Buddha avoided using this term and referred to himself in third person. When speaking of himself his preferred term was *tatagatha*, the "thus-going". From a radical Buddhist view, every person is a "thus going". The Buddha alone was the pre-eminent *tatagatha*, because in his life there was perfect co-incidence between his consciousness and actual passing existence.

The basic premises of the Buddha's ethic – *anicca*, impermanence; and *anatta,* no permanent self or substances – have a radical implication: craving for and clinging to things as if permanent and laden with intrinsic significance is based on commonly shared delusion and is a vestige of primitive animism. The empirical outcome of this deluded belief is ego-selfishness for material goods, sensuous pleasures, political power and most sinister of all, dogmatic clinging to sectarian views. That is why the debate over whether there is an eternal unchanging reality behind and beyond the changing appearance of things ceases to be purely theological or philosophical when one addresses the question of fundamental rights.

The Buddha recognised the intrinsic connection between the views a person clings to and his or her psychological disposition. He shifted traditional concern from the abstract or logical truth of ideas to investigation of the connection between ideas and their practical implications. He pointed out that people dogmatically cling to or reject views not because they are true or false but because they are in accordance with their likes or dislikes. Long before Friedrich Nietzsche, the Buddha masterfully disclosed that the belief in a permanent ultimate reality is fuelled by a compelling will-to-power, a strong desire to ground one's ideas, projects and institutions on an eternal, unchanging and invincible principle. To desire an infinite being is to magnify desire to infinite proportions. Today the practical outcome of this condition is belief that the economy is also an unchangeable, sacred reality manifesting itself as a spiral of infinite growth. Apologists for this system argue that its demi-urge – the profit motive – is the logical expression of human nature, which is

intrinsically egoistic. The Buddha declared the most dangerous of all deluded views to be the belief that the self or ego is a sovereign and immortal entity, that its body and the physical world are merely instruments of the ego's self-realisation. He established that such hubris is the root cause of conflict in the world (Majjhima Nikaya I.111).

The Buddha realised that even his own Teaching, wrongly grasped, could be a basis for conceit among his followers. The message could be reified into a doctrine, fetishised and fought over, instead of being used as a raft for crossing to the shore of freedom (Majjhima Nikaya I.135). The Buddha's Teaching is self-dissolving of its authority, because when the goal of the Path is realised, the Teaching as 'a view' can be discarded: liberated disciples would "speak of what is known by themselves, seen by themselves and found by themselves" (Majjihma Nikaya I.265).

Since all 'realities' are impermanent and without substance, the Buddha observed that "nothing is worth clinging to" (Majjhima Nikaya I.225). This not a recipe for melancholy but a hygienic measure for the depression that arises when people fail to recognise the true character of actuality: perpetual flux. The attitude the Buddha advocated for well-faring in an ocean of impermanence is *dispassion towards oneself and compassion towards others.* The community that the Buddha founded, as we shall see, was an attempt to translate this value into practice.

N.S.
Dehiwela, Sri Lanka
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Introduction

> I am aware that when I am teaching Dhamma to companies of many hundreds, each individual thinks thus about me: "The Teacher Gotama is teaching especially for me." But this should not be understood thus. When a *tatagatha* teaches Dhamma to others, he does so only for general upliftment (Majjhima Nikaya I.249).

The construction of "a religion called Buddhism" by Western scholars and Christian theologians towards the end of the eighteenth century, and their presentation of Siddhartha Gotama Buddha purely as a religious leader, has distracted attention from his teachings on social, political and economic affairs. The impression given suggests that he was primarily concerned with personal liberation from cosmic existence and that the way to realise this came to him in a flash of mystical illumination, even though the Buddha repeatedly insisted that his Teaching was not based on mystical insight or intuition. Determined to realise moral perfection, he broke through to an understanding about the root cause of human suffering, in all its dimensions, after six years of relentless search, investigation and experimentation. Especially in the West, the Buddha's Way is generally understood, especially in the West, as a way of meditation for achieving inner tranquillity, ideally practised in solitude, away from the vexations of everyday life. In the hybrid forms of Buddhism propagated in the West today, the social outreach of his Ethical Path is either ignored or underplayed.

The central concern of the Buddha's Dhamma (Teaching) and Magga (Ethical Path) is the identification and eradication of the sources of suffering. Human liberation is not a purely private affair, neither is it an escape from society or dissolution of the self in a "Cosmic Self". The Path's goal is eradication of craving for and clinging to things material and immaterial; to persons and institutions mistakenly perceived as supports. According to the Buddha, the obsessive oscillation between lust and hate is the principal source of suffering. Protest against oppressive social

institutions and compassionate actions to alleviate suffering in the world, were originally envisaged as integral aspects of Buddhist missionary endeavour. The Buddha sent out his first disciples with the mandate to propagate his message of deliverance "for the welfare and happiness of the many-folk (*bahujana*) out of compassion for the world". Even though this objective does not receive the attention it should today, Trevor Ling observes:

> Concern with social and political matters receive a large share of attention in the teaching of the Buddha as it is represented in the Pali texts... To speak of Buddhism as something concerned with the private destiny of the individual is to ignore the basic Buddhist repudiation of notion of the individual soul. The teaching of the Buddha was not concerned with the private destiny of the individual, but with something much wider, the whole realm of sentient being, the whole of consciousness. To attempt to understand Buddhism apart from its social dimension is futile (122).

Passages in the Buddhist canon's Book of Discipline, the Vinaya Pitaka, convey an impression that the Buddha's monastic order enjoyed the patronage of kings and social elites from the beginning. But the same scriptures provide no evidence that the Buddha resided in the type of well-appointed monastery described in the Book of Discipline. The picture emerging from the scriptures is of a teacher who for forty-five years went from place to place, propagating his Teaching, instructing and training his disciples so that they would realise the goal of his Path: Liberation from Suffering. The Buddha died as he had lived, "on the way". He passed away by an obscure village attended by his devoted aide, companion and kinsman Ananda. Besides Ananda, few disciples were present when he passed away. But his message of liberation captured the people's imagination and many embraced the new teaching. Without the backing of empire or force of arms, the Buddha's Dhamma spread far beyond Northeast India.

The analysis of Buddhism's social origins by German sociologist Max Weber continues, by and large, to influence scholarly and popular perceptions about early Buddhism. Weber's views were coloured by limited information from secondary sources available to

him at the time of writing. Weber argued that "it is a specifically unpolitical and anti-political status religion, more precisely a religious 'technology' of wandering and intellectually-schooled mendicant monks" from whose ranks "a rational economic ethic could not develop" (Weber 203 & 221).

In the decades since Weber wrote his dismissive appraisal, scholars of Buddhist canonical works have buried the notion that the Buddhist ideal is life-denying. Views from two scholars of Indian religion and philosophy reflect realistic analysis of factors leading to Buddhism's rise:

> Hitherto unheard of miseries created in the lives of the people by the new institutions of taxation, slavery, extortion, torture, interest, usury: the voluminous Jatakas are full of these. The Buddha himself saw all these. But what was to be done? He was too realistic to believe that God, prayers and sacrifices could bring any effective remedy to the miseries he saw all around him... Nor could the Buddha believe in the value of ascetic self-mortification, which he consered 'painful, unworthy and unprofitable'. He was, again, too disturbed to take seriously the Upanishadic claim that metaphysical wisdom could bring salvation... In short, the problem that obsessed him most was essentially a practical one. It was the bewildering mass of sufferings he saw around him. And he wanted to have an essentially practical solution for this. But how, under the conditions in which he lived, could such a solution at all be evolved...? He asked the people to take the *pabbajja* and the *upasampada* ordinations, i.e., 'to go out' of the actual society and 'to arrive at' life in the *samgha*-s or the community of monks. For within the *samgha*-s things were different. Modelled consciously on the tribal collectives – without private property and with full equality and democracy among the brethren – these alone could offer the real scope to practise the 'simple grandeur of the ancient gentile people', for which the Buddha was really pleading. The Sanghas could become 'the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of spiritless conditions' (Chattopadyaya 1987: 157-159).

> Brahminism, as is well known, sanctified the estate structure of society (its division into the *varnas*) and the dominant position of the Brahmin priests, who by that time had become an impediment to social progress. Buddhism rose against the senseless sacrificial system [of the priests] and, in the first

> place against him to the sacrifices were offered – against the God Brahma, declaring him to be non-existent. The cult of someone who never existed is truly meaningless. They dealt a final blow to Brahmins and their property institutions, Buddhists spoke against any property whatever and against the boundaries between the estates... Reflecting as it did the dissatisfaction of the free commoners and the lower urban castes, which were ruined and oppressed, Buddhism succeeded in winning the support of many oppressed people suffering from lack of rights, poverty, and hunger. In referring to early Buddhism, it should be noted that it succeeded, under the definite socio-historical conditions of the times, in expressing in a specific form the aspiration of the people for a better life (Brodov 110).

The Buddha insisted that he was a human being who had broken free from the shackles of craving "by human energy, by human effort and by human striving" (Anguttara Nikaya I.45). This unambiguous statement excludes the possibility for insinuating that the Buddha's Path to Human Liberation was based on a divine revelation or was enabled by divine grace. But within the first century after his death, the historical Buddha was transformed into a wondrous person, superior to all beings, even the gods. Some Buddhist traditions maintain that the Buddha reincarnates himself from time to time, solely out of compassion. Such views, G.C. Pande (29) notes, are quite foreign to the earliest texts and must have developed gradually. Good historical reasons can be advanced for this elevation of the Buddha to quasi-divine status. Popular enthusiasm for the Buddha's message of liberation attracted the attention of social elites, and the community of renouncers received lavish donations of land and goods from kings and wealthy entrepreneurs. Early texts are critical of disciples who readily accepted donations of entire villages and ruled over them like kings. The Book of Discipline records the first donation of an entire village, together with its inhabitants, to a member of the male mendicant order. This 'renouncer' began a successful business enterprise in the village, which came to be called by his name. Monastic landlordism structurally integrated the order of mendicants into the system of production. The radical edge of the original message was blunted, as monastics sought to justify the social system rather than criticise it. The Buddha was projected as a

superhuman being whose life ordinary men and women could not emulate.

Widespread enthusiasm for the Buddha's teaching was due in part to its propagation in simple and popular language. The Buddha ruled that his Teaching should be propagated everywhere in the language of the people (Vinaya Pitaka II.139), a striking departure from the practice of the orthodox priests, the Brahmins. They had reified the (Hindu) Vedic traditions and their ritual incantations in an elegant language, Sanskrit, which ordinary people could not understand. Sanskrit became fetishised as a sacred language. The Buddha's words have been preserved in one of the Magadhan languages, Pali, and today monks chant this language on ritual occasions. Simple devotees no longer understand the chanting and have come to believe that the mere sound of the Buddha's words in Pali has a propitious effect: for example, that can turn ordinary water and reels of thread into things vested with supernatural power. This notwithstanding Buddha's condemnation of such fetishistic beliefs and other superstitious practices like astrology, palmistry and divination as "base arts and wrong means of livelihood" and the products of "animal like consciousness" (Digha Nikaya I.9-13).

In Sri Lanka today a Buddhist monk is president of the National Astrological Association. Buddhist politicians consult monk-astrologers and Hindu swamis alike before fixing dates for important events like the calling of elections. The Buddha explicitly forbade his mendicant disciples to engage in such activities. There is a direct relationship between the quasi-divinisation of the human Gotama and the seepage of 'Brahmanic' ideas and practices into folk-Buddhism. As the Buddha was made to recede further and further from ordinary mortals, the mediators of his words and blessings became more important than the Buddha himself.

In countries like Sri Lanka, Buddhist institutions and popular practices seem 'orthodox' because their external features are similar to these institutions and practices described in the canonical works. But the same scriptures contain traces of more radical ideas and practices. This study aims to highlight these radical elements, which suggest that in the beginning Buddhism was a social movement of dissent and protest against social abuses of the time. The

communities of mendicant men and women tried to embody the values of the Buddha's Teaching and offer people a model for egalitarian and harmonious living. The radical elements of early Buddhism have now been submerged by dominant social values: a glaring example is justification of the caste system or gender and social inequalities through appeals to the Buddhist theory of re-birth. Yet canonical works clearly indicate that the first Buddhists raised a banner of revolt against caste, priestcraft, tyranny and social injustice. This submerged tradition can be recovered and revivified. It can provide inspiration for Buddhists and others who are committed to social renewal and the creation of a just and humane society.

Chapter 1

Foundations of the Western Philosophy of Right

Western ideas, experiences and struggles for emancipation condition the contemporary discourse on human rights. It is therefore important to understand the philosophical bases of Western theories of law and the discourse on rights, especially fundamental rights, to be in a better position to appreciate the areas where there is either convergence or divergence between Buddhist and Western political philosophies and practices.

The Middle Ages

The European Middle Ages is a good departure point from which to trace the genealogy of the Western philosophy of right underlying modern secular constitutions. That period marked the beginning of developments leading to what we today call Western Europe and Western Civilisation. In the Middle Ages, Western Europe was called Christendom, as it had been effectively Christianised and Latinised. It was deemed a Holy Roman Empire, because the Roman Pontiff was its spiritual head and an allied Christian Emperor its temporal head. Christendom was in fact a loose aggregation of baronial estates, fiefdoms and kingdoms acknowledging allegiance to the Pontiff and the Emperor. Theology was regarded as the "science of sciences": the authoritative source for understanding and explaining the hidden meaning and purpose of everything under the sun. The Christian God was fully accepted as the Sovereign Lord and King of both the temporal and spiritual orders; the Pope and Emperor derived their powers from Him.

The first article of Christian faith says that God is "Father Almighty". These two words are of crucial importance to understand the originary Western theory of power. They define invincible might as a divine quality. Attributing this power to a divine father means that father-power, patriarchal power, constitutes the 'Ground of all Being', the Ultimate Reality. The theory disguises earthly reality in heavenly terms and thereby theologically reinforces power relationships in the earthly family. This method was not peculiar to the Christian West. The Brahmins, as discussed in Chapter 2, used exactly the same technique.

The definition of God as an Almighty Being is also the first constituting element in the Western theory of political power. God is by nature the paramount Sovereign Being, with the right to demand total allegiance and obedience from His creatures. The Christian theory of right is based on a masculinised concept of power and sovereignty. Similarly, the Christian theory of the divine right of kings establishes the right to rule not on popular consent, but on the will of God as mediated by the Church. The right of succession to the throne, given the masculine character of ultimate power, was necessarily the right of a king's sons. By the same token, ecclesiastical power was the exclusive preserve of men. A monarch became a sovereign ruler by divine delegation, mediated by the Church, and he acted as God's intermediary. The king was answerable only to God; only the Pope, Christ's Visible Representative on earth, could challenge his legitimacy. The people had the right to revolt only if the king became a tyrant and violated the Divine Mandate, not because he had broken a contract made with the people. Rebellions were considered legitimate only with the sanction of ecclesiastical authorities.

The Western philosophy of right is based on a *descending analysis of power*. God's sovereign power alighted on the heads of the Pope and Emperor like a quantum of might and percolated down through the hierarchically ordered ranks of the Church and State. This theory corresponded to how the Pope, Emperor and kings actually ruled their subjects. Distinction between 'religious' and 'secular' spheres of society did not exist. The entire social order was a manifestation of a divine design in which the sacred and profane

overlapped. The Pope was the guardian of an Empire that was both Holy and Roman. Pope Boniface VIII made the most extreme assertion of papal sovereignty in his edict Unam Sanctam of 1302, declaring that the first Pope, Peter, had two swords, symbolising that all power on earth – temporal and spiritual – had been handed to the head of the Roman Church by Christ. The Popes had merely passed the sword of temporal power to the kings and Emperor, and they were obliged to exercise it under papal tutelage. Boniface's claim went beyond an assertion of sovereignty over Christendom. He declared that there was no salvation outside the Roman Church and that every human creature was subject to the Roman Pontiff.

Given this theologically grounded theory of sovereign power and its divine origins, a king was not merely *de facto* but also *de jure* a despotic ruler. The people could only hope that an almighty king would govern mercifully, just as their God did. When God – the Almighty and Merciful Father – forgave one of his creatures, or a king granted amnesty to one of his subjects, both did so arbitrarily and out of absolute free will, not from any requirement of human law or the moral claims of the people. The very act of mercy affirmed the arbitrary and despotic character of power. Being merciful enhanced the glory of power.

The residents in a king's dominion were not only his subjects but also his property, as the Treaty of Westphalia confirmed in 1648, when German princes met to end to more than a century of war between Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists. They agreed to accept the situation on the ground: thenceforth they would confine their claims of sovereignty only over those territories they had captured or retained. Religious war was ended on the principle of *cuius regio eius religio*: the religion of a people would be the religion of their ruler. If the ruler was Lutheran, his subjects, even if formerly Roman Catholic, would have to profess the Lutheran faith. As far as ordinary men and women were concerned, the concept of religious freedom did not exist.

The Enlightenment and Thereafter

For a variety of reasons, the feudal system in Europe collapsed and several nation-states rose from Christendom's ruins. These new states were also constituted on the principle of *cuius regio eius religio*. Any defiance of this principle was regarded as seditious and 'heretics' were often burned at the stake. Each new nation-state had its own state religion: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran or Calvinist. Yet by the end of the First World War, European monarchies had either been abolished or subordinated to constitutional rule of law. What basic philosophical assumptions upheld the new democratic constitutions and the bills of rights enshrining them?

Europe had been riven by centuries of internecine conflict between Christian sects, each demanding absolute submission to their particular interpretation of revealed truths. However the discovery of new lands and advances in the physical sciences undermined the hegemonic position the churches had enjoyed over truth and knowledge. The Christian faith and its theological interpretations were no longer a satisfactory means for understanding the world and for determining practical action within it. By early eighteenth century, new approaches to knowledge, also called "science", began to dislodge theology from its seat as the "science of sciences", notably British Empiricism, German Rational Philosophy and French Philosophical Materialism. It is not surprising that Francis Bacon titled his great work on the empirical method *Novum Organum Scientiarum*: "A New Source of Science/Knowledge". The referent of the word "science" had shifted either to empiricism or rational philosophy, but the cachet of "true and privileged knowledge" attached to the word "science" remained unchanged. In Western intellectual tradition, for knowledge to be deemed "scientific" signifies more than a simple assertion that it is the outcome of verifiable procedures. It invests in it the same power of privileged knowledge and truth enjoyed by theology since medieval times. The new "sciences" produced a novel intellectual climate and the eighteenth century came to be regarded as the Age of

Enlightenment. The Light of Reason, or Empiricism, replaced the Light of Faith.

The ideas and discoveries of pre-eighteenth century scholars influenced the social and political philosophers of the Enlightenment. Galileo empirically confirmed the Copernican hypothesis that the earth revolves, and this also brought about a "Copernican revolution" in the human sciences. "Revolution" became a powerful political term, as European political philosophers began to argue that the struggle to change the social order was not based on a fantastic hope, but was in accordance with the nature of actuality itself. The Roman Church's condemnation of Galileo needs to be understood in this context. If the implications of Galileo's theory were translated into political theory, it would mean the end of the feudal order that the Roman Church defended and according to which its own internal structure had been organised. The old philosophical constructs of fixed and unchanging substance needed to be replaced with a new process-based model.

German philosopher Friedrich Hegel accomplished this task. Plato held that the visible world was a static and shadowy reflection of Universal Ideas conceived by an Absolute Mind, or Absolute Spirit. Hegel shook this Platonic world-view and argued that far from being eternally perfect and self-sufficient, the Absolute Spirit had been in the throes of coming to self-awareness through a long historical process culminating in emergence of the Prussian State. Hegel merged the Christian idea of a personal and creative God with this new interpretation of the Absolute Spirit. The Christian Ethic or the "Spirit of Christianity", had finally incarnated itself and was personified in the Leader of the Prussian State, the Kaiser. The State was the embodiment of neighbourly Christian ethical imperative because it finally superseded the perpetual clash of conflicting interests in civil society. Obedience to the State became the highest moral imperative because it reconciled the conflict between particular interests by subsuming them in the general interest of all citizens. The mystical yearning of the little self to be absolved in an Absolute Self found its political expression in the total surrender of the naturally egoistic citizen to the will of the Kaiser and the State. Hegel laid the theoretical foundation for modern totalitarianism by

blending religious mysticism with the political will to absolute power: Absolute Spirit provided and ideological rationale for the spirit of absolutism.

Among the Enlightenment's positive achievements was its rejection of blind submission to 'irrational' beliefs that had produced centuries of bloodshed. The Enlightenment heralded the dawn of the so-called Modern Age: Immanuel Kant, the "Prophet of the Enlightenment", drew on images from Judaeo-Christian tradition to declare that the Enlightenment marked a secular "Exodus" from the Age of Infancy and Myth *(mythos)* to an Age of Maturity and Reason (*logos*). Besides the near-religious belief in historical progress, the Enlightenment produced a humanistic world-view that has had a lasting impact not only on European society but on all societies. Having abandoned its geocentric view of the universe, humankind could now finally revolve around its 'true sun': humanity itself. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the culmination of a process that began with the Enlightenment. Even though Europeans were involved in the slave trade and subjugation of non-European peoples at the time, the Enlightenment produced ideas that would inevitably clash with the savage practices of Christian states at home and abroad.

One direct impact of empiricism was replacement of barbaric trials by ordeal, practised by both secular and ecclesiastical authorities, with the Law of Evidence. Changing social conditions provided fertile soil for the Enlightenment, and gradually barbarous practices like slavery, torture, public burning, stoning, impaling, drawing and quartering, flaying, trampling to death by horses, boiling in oil or immersing in saltpeter were abolished. These gruesome punishments were public spectacles calculated not so much to punish the culprit as to instil terror into the populace. Defiance of the law was an affront to the sovereignty of the Church and State, and had to be publicly atoned for. The tarnished majesty of power had to be redressed. The terrifying atrocious rituals and unbridled exercise of vindictive justice found theoretical expression in the theology of expiation of sins, through suffering as a form of divine satisfaction.

With the spread and eventual triumph of the Enlightenment's ideas, judicial punishment could no longer be justified as the rightful vengeance of a sovereign on a rebellious subject. Without backing from the State, the Church could no longer impose barbarous punishment on subjects branded heretics or schismatic. The Holy Inquisition, which condemned men and women to death by torture, was renamed the Holy Office. The practice of scrutinising and punishing remained in religious form, the ultimate punishment for grievous sins or heresy being excommunication. According to Catholic theology, if a person dies without being reconciled to the Church, he or she will burn forever in the fires of hell. To the believer, this is a fate worse than burning on a stake, because the fires of hell are everlasting and they burn without destroying the victim. The primitive notion of justice as retribution for the violation of a sovereign right thus continues to be asserted.

British and French Enlightenment thinkers unanimously believed in the potential similarity and unity of all humankind. They held that all human beings subsist under the same *natural law* of reason and right. They supposed that all humans would participate alike in the same progress and that in the long run all historical developments would lead to the flowering of a single universal civilisation in which all peoples would participate equally. At the political level, the Enlightenment had a profound impact on the American constitution and the post-revolutionary constitution of France, both of which began with a declaration of human rights.

The Theory of the Divine Right of Kings was relegated to the dustbin of history. Political power was divorced from the king's person, and the people were no longer regarded as his property. The new constitutions did away with all the former criteria for defining political rights, namely birth, religion, wealth and education. Similarly, political power, wealth and social position were no longer regarded as privileges of birth. This separation of political rights from birth, wealth and social status legally abolished the theological belief in the essentially hierarchical nature of social order determined by God. It seemed as if the promised ending of social inequalities after death, in Heaven, had been partially realised on earth, in the political realm. All citizens were equal before the law.

Some Aspects of the Western Philosophical Discourse

The new political reality that emerged with the collapse of European despotism, the adoption of secular liberal constitutions and the capitalist mode of production all brought into being a qualitatively new polity and social ethic. It is useful to examine some aspects of continuity and discontinuity in the Western ethical and political discourse, because with Western colonisation of almost every part of the globe, the West has established its hegemony over global production of knowledge and wealth.

1. The ending of the centuries-old union of the Church and State created a new (legal) fiction. While everything was saturated with religion before the democratic revolutions, the new constitutions divided the world into religious and secular segments. The State was emancipated from religion, but its citizens were not. Bestowed on the citizenry was not freedom from religion but religious freedom. The State was indifferent to what its subjects believed in, as long as belief did not come into conflict with the State's sovereign right to main public law and order. Religion became a purely private affair. People were free to adopt one religion or another, and religions could compete to win adherents. Religion had become a commodity subject to market forces of supply and demand. The State was constitutionally freed from the burden of adjudicating the truth or falsehood of a particular belief system. Infractions of duly constituted civic order were no longer deemed sins against God, but crimes against the State. The State, not God, had become the scrutinising Eye of Society.

2. In the new secular states, the Christian God was, for all practical purposes, banished from the political and economic spheres. Politically, ruling morality was governed by *real politik*, aimed at ensuring public order and safeguarding the internal and external security of the nation-state. In the economic sphere, ruling morality was determined by the free play of market

forces: the Temple of the New Society was, and remains, the Market, where the weal or woe of people is decided. Philosophers may try to pin down universal values that cut across the boundaries of religion, nationality and culture, but in the real world the most fundamental value is Money. Significantly, Money is regarded as having intrinsic 'value'; in today's world, a person without money has no value at all: it is the new enabling grace, the real mediator between humans and happiness. People cannot still their hunger if they cannot translate it into monetary terms: they are doomed to die if they cannot sell their talents and energy, be it a man's labour power or a woman's sensual power. A person with money has the type of power that was once the prerogative of the gods. With money, an ugly person can buy beauty; the uneducated, the services of scholars and scientists; the sensualist, the blessings of the ascetic; and the unscrupulous businessperson, the patronage of a religious professional. Thus it is not being facetious to ask whether discussion about fundamental values is not perhaps an unconscious discourse about the most fundamental value of all in today's consumerist culture. Is not Money the unspoken foundation of today's secular discourse on 'fundamental' values? What practical relevance do these discussions have if they do not expose and challenge the monetary soul of the dominant value system?

3. The new nation-states that arose with the break-up of Christendom regarded themselves as sovereign territories made up of sovereign individuals. The discourse about sovereignty, which had a theological genealogy, was not abandoned. The notion of sovereignty was, as discussed, originally a divine prerogative shared by kings and the Pope. Now it was reaffirmed in secular form for states, and for the people who enjoyed citizenship rights within their borders. In the West, right was genealogically Divine Right descending onto the head of the king, giving him the right to rule. The king was the head and the (royal) body he governed was his kingdom. The new liberal constitutions were based on a theologically grounded theory of

right. The king may have been physically decapitated, as in France, or he may have been turned into a constitutional figurehead, but his body remained the central concept in the whole Western legal edifice:

> Whether the jurists were the King's henchmen or his adversaries, it is (still) of royal power that we are speaking in every case when we speak of the grandiose edifices of legal thought and knowledge (Foucault 95).

After decapitating the king literally and/or legally, his body was, as it were, dismembered and reconstituted as a new 'body politic' of which all citizens were members. The sovereignty that had descended from God onto the king was now dispersed among the separate individuals who together made up a 'sovereign state'. Assuming that the original human beings were solitary (male) individuals, Western political philosophers developed a contractual theory of state power. Intrinsically free and sovereign individuals surrender their Individual Will to a General Will. The General Will, or the State, is given the right to rule over the individual citizen. This fiction forms the basis of Rousseau's theory of Social Contract.

4. Compared to the despotism of feudal rulers, the new constitutions were an advance, but they were based on several questionable assumptions. Western political philosophers like Hobbes and Rousseau proceeded from the assumption that human beings are by nature egoistic individuals. In fact the Western notion of freedom consists in the freedom to follow one's self-interests. The General Will is necessary to ensure that the pursuit of egoistic interests will not militate against the general interest of all egoists. Egoism is assumed inherent to human nature. Hobbes ascribed egoistic behaviour to the "state of nature", whereas it can be shown that egoistic man is the product of determinate historical social developments. A social contract is argued to be necessary because humans are by nature egoistic. This pessimistic view of human nature and of the naturally egoistic individual has its roots in the Christian belief

that humans have been either totally or partially corrupted by a primordial fall from innocence. From this point of view, concern for the general welfare is at its best merely a question of enlightened self-interest.

5. The notion that each individual is self-sufficient, with a unique and intrinsic self-identity and the sovereign right to his or her individual self-fulfilment, is rooted in an assumption germane to Greek philosophy and Christian theology. The ancient Greeks believed that the physical world was made up of fundamental and further indivisible elements or "atoms", the Greek word *atomos* meaning "indivisible". The notion that society is made up of unique separate individuals is the sociological concomitant of an atomistic view of the physical world, the Latin *individuum* meaning "indivisible". Aristotle provided a rational basis for the theological view that each separate individual is divided internally between a physical body and a spiritual self: the soul inhabits the body and rules over it as its personal territory. According to this view, the body is external to the real self. Skin is like the border demarcating the boundary of a sovereign state. Other individuals demarcate the limits of my freedom just as much as I demarcate the limits of their freedom. Since it is assumed that all humans are egoistic by nature, the other person is not a condition of my being and my freedom, but potentially an obstacle and threat to my freedom. At best they are a means to my own freedom and happiness, because I serve their needs only so far as they serve my needs. Each makes use of the other for personal benefit. Altruism is predicated on the belief of ego existence; it is merely a subtle form of narcissism.

6. What spirit of sovereignty animates the nation-state and each separate individual? How is a conditioned, finite and transient being regarded as a sovereign person? The essential role of theories of right, Foucault (95) argues, has been to fix the legitimacy of power and the limits of sovereign power. The aim of discourse on sovereign power, he suggests, has been to veil or efface the domination (by God and king) that is intrinsic to it. It

may then be presented *at the level of appearance* under two different aspects: on the one hand, as the legitimate rights of sovereignty, and on the other, as the legal obligation to obey. The major concern underlying his studies on power and right, Foucault explains, has been to expose the sophistry behind the assumption of sovereign power; to reverse this mode of analysis, in order to conduct what he calls an *ascending analysis of power* (99).

The traditional genealogy of power traces its origin to something above humans, which overwhelms and dominates them. Democracy is seen as the decentralisation of power that was once the prerogative of gods and despots. The Western theory of sovereignty does not give a historical explanation of how power became consolidated at the top or at the centre. Foucault sees power as a circuit running through society at all levels. An ascending analysis of power would start with the infinitesimal mechanisms of power in which individuals are simultaneously submitting to power as well as exercising it. It seeks to trace these mechanisms to their historical, not heavenly, origins. These subtle mechanisms of power 'normalised' in everyday life are invested, colonised, consolidated and utilised by economic and political institutions. Their political usefulness and the way they lend themselves to serve economic interests and provide sustenance to institutionalised forms of power like the State, Church, family, etc., has to be revealed. In other words, the individual will-to-power is not surrendered to a general will. It is rather the condensation of myriad power relationships that form a circuit of power. People submit to power in order to subject others to their power. Even a slave regards himself as the master of his wife. It is this individual will-to-power and the desire for power that explains why individuals both submit to and exercise power. Foucault calls for micro-analysis of the circuits of power in society. His *ascending analysis of power* follows Nietzsche's disclosure of the intimate link between the power of desire and the desire for power. People humble themselves in order to elevate themselves; people resist power to capture power. Those who seek to "empower the

powerless" or to share some degree of power seldom question the basis of that which they wish to transfer or share. The circuits of power pass through the state apparatuses and institutions; they are not wholly localised in them. Foucault's micro-analysis of power highlights the ethical moment in interpersonal relationships.

7. The new constitutions perpetuated the mythic belief that the public realm, the "body politic", is a masculine realm: the American constitution declared that all *men* are created equal; the ideal of the French constitution was Liberty, Equality and *Fraternity*. This is not surprising because, as we have seen, power – divine, ecclesiastical and royal – was genealogically a male prerogative. In Judaeo-Christian tradition, the origin of the human race – the patrix, to be precise – was a solitary male, Adam. As Carole Pateman observes, the new democratic constitutions were only a partial dismantling of patriarchy, a revolt of sons against father-power. They were based not on a general social contract but on a *fraternal social contract.* Enlightenment thinkers did not exclude women from the political sphere on the grounds that they were ritually unclean, they provided a more sophisticated 'reason': women were incapable of making mature political decisions because they were by nature emotional and irrational creatures. As explicitly stated by Immanuel Kant in *Manifesto of the Enlightenment*, the politically mature individual was the educated White Male: "The steps to maturity for the rest of humankind, including the entire fair sex, are not only difficult but dangerous." The White Male had the pedagogical task to lead the rest of humankind step by step to mature rationality. This belief provided a rationale for what the West believed was its historic mission: to subjugate, colonise and exploit the labour and resources of non-white peoples. The religious motive behind Christian missionary enterprise was not abandoned but reformulated in secular and rational terms, as a "civilising mission", or "Manifest Destiny".

   Responding to injustice committed in the name of freedom and equality, Mary Wolstonecraft wrote *Vindication of the*

Rights of Women in 1792. It would take another two centuries before women, through determined and courageous struggle, obtained the formal right to franchise and political participation in only some parts of the world. Patriarchal religions continue to exclude women from public office on the grounds of ritual impurity and many states exclude women from political participation.

8. The new constitutions abolished all the hitherto existing criteria for determining the right to power: birth, wealth, education and religion. They made all *men,* as abstract citizens, equal. But this was only a partial and *legal* emancipation. All authorities, including king and feudal powers, secular and ecclesiastical, were brought under the constitution and the rule of law. All citizens were equal, in the political realm. It seemed as if the Christian Heaven, where everyone is equal *after death*, had partially descended to earth. But the qualities abolished in the new heavenly political realm continued to determine a person's opportunities in *real life*, in civil society governed by rule of law.

   An example can clarify formal democracy's paradoxical nature. All democratic states periodically hold general elections to choose their governments. When individuals cast their vote they ritually celebrate equality before the law with every other citizen of the same state. They become, as it were, magically transformed into free and sovereign individuals who have the power to determine who shall govern them, a power once the prerogative of the gods. But it is only as abstract citizens that they enjoy this divine power. The moment they leave the polling booth and step into the street, the real power differentials in civil society – based on gender, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, education and wealth – become operative again. The elector is no longer an abstract legal entity, but a real human being of flesh and blood. And there's the rub. In almost every society, the social and political power of men and women is not the same. In what sense can we say that gender difference is not a political difference, if women do not have the same right to self-realisation as men? How can wealth be non-political when it

provides the means for persuasion and patronage, and for realising one's political ambitions? The uneducated person is not in the same position as the educated one to formulate meaningful policies or to critically evaluate political programmes. Is not lack of access to knowledge and information an intrinsic aspect of a person's powerlessness? Can race, caste and religion be regarded as apolitical in a society full of prejudice and bigotry?

9. The Rule of Law introduces an in-built tension between individuals as citizens on the one hand and self-seeking members of civil society on the other. As a citizen, I am expected to put the common good before my egoistic personal or sectarian interests, but as a member of civil society I have the fundamental right to pursue my self-interests, personal and sectarian. In a society driven by free competition between individuals, the real human being is the self-seeking egoistic individual, but the ideal individual, as a *citizen* – the juridical entity – is supposed to be 'civic minded', an altruistic person, concerned about the general interest. This underlying assumption of the Social Contract, that the human being is by origin and nature an egoistic individual, creates a contradiction between my individual interests and my social responsibilities. The latter are seen only as *civic duties* and not as ethical imperatives emanating from a social and cooperative species nature. The further we go back in history the more we come across groups, not individuals. The intense individualism of contemporary Western societies is accompanied by highly developed social cooperation. A single person living in a well-appointed penthouse may imagine that he or she is a self-sufficient atom, but this conceit is possible because of a highly advanced system of production. The 'individual' with access to socially produced wealth merely consumes in private what has been produced through social cooperation. The complex network of production, exchange and distribution renders the chains of interdependence impersonal and opaque, whereas in simple societies this cooperation is directly perceived as personal and social.

10. In Rousseau's theory, the General Will is the imposition of concentrated power against the very individuals who constitute it. The immediate aftermath of the French Revolution exposed the horrible implications of the General Will: it boomeranged like a deadly weapon on the very people who had surrendered their individual will to it. A democratic republic, founded on the Declaration of the Rights of Man, unleashed "The Terror" on its own citizens. The Terror was inhuman and atrocious; its greatest numbers of victims were the weakest sections of society: seventy percent are estimated to have been of the peasant and labouring classes (Palmer & Colton 403). This was the first of many atrocities committed in the name of the State as the embodiment of the General Will and "Highest Good of the People". Ever since, criminal states have taken refuge behind the theory of sovereignty.

    One needs therefore to question the assumption underlying contemporary political practice: both one-party revolutionaries and multi-party politicians firmly believe that one must capture state power in order to change society. Can a political party (dictatorial or liberal) usher in a humane society if the unquestioned ideologies that motivate it are not radically humane? Politicians are not a-societal beings. The institutions they seek to control will inevitably reflect the contradictions, conflicts and dominant values of civil society. In other words, *can a state be humane if civil society is not civilised?* The struggle for legal guarantees of human rights must be accompanied by a movement for the democratisation and civilisation of everyday life in the crystalline institutions of civil society: the family and workplace, religious groups and professional organisations. Economics and politics are about the right regulation of human activities. First and foremost this is an *ethical* imperative. The relegation of ethics to the realm of religion deflects attention from this fundamental truth. Religions, moreover, have been very divisive influences. Religious rights have been pushed to the extreme to justify wars committed in their name as 'sacred'. Consensus on ethical values is needed to transcend particular beliefs and practices of organised religions.

> That calls for radical affirmation of human values. "Radical" implies going to the radix, or root of the matter, and for humans the root is the human: fragile, ephemeral and mortal.

By drawing attention to legal shortcomings I do not in anyway mean to belittle formal democracy or dismiss the struggles for fundamental human rights enshrined in bills of rights. Formal democracy is a historic advance when compared to feudal despotism, but the recognition and encoding of rights is only the beginning of human emancipation. The struggle for human rights is not simply the struggle of Civil Society vs. the State. In many countries, the dignity of women and children and the rights of animals and the environment are routinely violated *in civil society*. Such violations are often defended in the name of the civic rights of religious and cultural groups constituting civil society. The existence of a democratic constitution recognising cultural pluralism is by no means an indication that the society has a democratic culture.

Whatever a nation's professed ideals, the character of the party in power and the actual functioning of state apparatuses is largely determined by the citizenry's level of ethical and cultural development. The theory of sovereignty determines the limits within which each individual and each nation can act by law, just as the boundary between two privately owned fields is marked by a fence. Up to now, the highest achievement of the democratic revolutions has been civil society: its aim is to ensure the security of life, limb and property of individuals brought under the rule of a common law. But as members of a social species, human beings must think and act not as separate individuals, but as participants in a universal community. Once individual freedom and dignity have been protected from despotic and dictatorial rule, the long-term aim should be to create a social humanity and a humane environment where all the barriers erected in civil society are demolished. Until civil society abandons sectarian and egoistic interests and commits itself to the universal essence of the species, the ideals enshrined in declarations of rights will remain hollow slogans. The real emancipation of human beings has to be acted out not at state level, but in civil society.

A commitment to our common humanity is at the same time a determination to end all relations wherein human dignity is trampled underfoot and the human being is treated as a debased, enslaved, forsaken and despicable creature. This is the highest ethical imperative. It is, as shall be discussed, what the Buddha called The Rule of the Noble.

Chapter 2

Brahmin Political Theory

Buddhism has practically disappeared from the land of its birth. Brahminism has come to be known as the religion of India, for what is today called "Orthodox Hinduism", or Hindutva, is in fact the Brahminism revolted against by early Buddhists. Yet as early Buddhism changed from a movement of social protest to a status religion headed by monastic landlords, the lines blurred between the ideas and practices propagated by the first Buddhists and those they vigorously opposed. To appreciate early Buddhism's radicalism and to critically evaluate contemporary Buddhism, we need to understand the principal features of Brahmin theology and ethics. The theoretical and practical criticism of Hindutva remains an unfinished historical task of Buddhism.

Brahminism developed around eighth century BCE in the land between the Yamuna and Ganga rivers, The Doab, or "two-river land". The Brahmins called it "Brahmarishidesa": the land of the holy *rishis*, or seers. The Brahmins ingratiated themselves to tribal chiefs and kings by monopolising knowledge of ritual and providing theological rationalisations to legitimise the hierarchically stratified society that emerged in The Doab. Brahmin theology aimed to provide an ideology to maintain and reproduce this historically arisen social order as if it were a divinely ordained cosmo-social scheme willed by the creator-god Brahma. The Brahmin theory of four colours, *varnadhamma*, was in fact an ingenious structural-functional explanation of society. According to the originating myth of this social order (Rig Veda X.90), a male called Purusha was sacrificed and his body dismembered. The body parts were reassembled and revivified such that the Brahmins (*brahmana*) came from the mouth; the ruling warrior class (*ksatriya*), from the arms; the land-owning peasants (*vaisya*), from the stomach; and the property-less domestic slaves and land labourers (*sudra*), from the

feet. People who lost their lands to the expanding agricultural economy or resisted assimilation were "outcastes"; regarded as the most ritually polluting humans. In the Buddha's Day, they were called *candala*.

The myth of a resurrected male god mystically embodying the new society effectively excluded women from the religious and secular public spheres. Brahmin polemics against women and *sudras* were vicious. The priest-theologians declared that women were ritually unclean and that the womb produced only "an animal-like existence" doomed to decay and death. They therefore ruled that male children born to the three upper strata, the *ariya*, should be born again through a birth-rite performed by priests. This rite made men of the *ariya* rank *dvija*, or "twice-born". Re-birth ritual was deemed unnecessary for women and *sudras* since they were regarded as intrinsically and irredeemably unclean. The repeated injunctions against women by the Brahmin God-king and Law Giver, Manu – that they should be constantly watched over, kept in subjugation and given no freedom – are understandable given the wholly fictional and fantastic character of Brahmin theory on social order. The Brahmins had to denounce women as a dangerous illusion and relegate them to the impermanent corporeal realm, because they were aware that life coming from the womb in practice undermined their grand scheme of 'reality'. Whatever pretensions the Brahmins conceived in their heads, the common birth process undermined their theory that human beings constitute four social ranks because they emanate from four different sources and four separate species, or *jati*. As the Buddha pointed out to a group of Brahmin scholars, all these distinctions dissolve in the womb. Men from the four ranks could and did have intercourse with women of other ranks, and had normal human offspring. If the Brahmin theory of separate *jati* were true, he argued, such unions would have produced strange hybrids. If a creator-god had determined this order of human society, then society at all times and in all places would display the same social structure. But this, the Buddha argued, was demonstrably false. While the Brahmins spoke about a natural division of society into four strata, among the Greeks only two divisions existed: the free and the slaves. Even there, the free-born could fall into slavery and

slaves ascend to the ranks of the free. So, the Buddha asked, how could social position have been determined by an innate nature? It is not nature that prevents people from changing their life conditions, but culture (Majjhima Nikaya II.153). The Brahmins had naturalised culture to present social reproduction of the division of labour as a natural occurrence, like biological reproduction of different animal species. Marriage between members of two different *varna* would be as unnatural as copulation between two different species of animals.

Understandably, the Brahmins placed themselves at the top of the social pyramid. Their entire theory is the expression of a perverse will-to-power by the priestly class; even the gods are powerless, caught in the web of priestly power, subject to their ritual mantras and charms. When the right mantra was uttered and the proper ritual performed, effects followed irrespective of the officiating priest's morality. Sylvain Levy in his *Doctrine du sacrifice chez les Brahmanas* sums up Brahminism's diabolical essence as follows:

> It is difficult to imagine anything more brutal and more materialistic than the theology of the Brahmanas. Notions which usage afterwards gradually refined and clothed with a garb of morality take us aback by their savage realism... Morality in fact finds no place in this system of sacrifice which regulates the relation of man to the divinites (in Rhys Davids 241).

The Brahmins based their teachings and priestly powers on the authority of the Rig Vedas. But the earliest hymns of the Rig Veda do not mention the doctrines which became integral parts of both orthodox Hinduism and later orthodox Buddhism namely belief in the separate individual and personal salvation; the fourfold *varna* scheme; and the theories of individual re-births and transmigration of soul

Another view disseminated in the Buddha's Day was a form of metaphysical idealism. This speculative world-view arose outside priestly circles and was based on the mystical experiences of forest sages. These philosophers held that consciousness was the 'true self' and that it was something other than the physical body. They believed that in transcendental states the mystic reached pure consciousness. From this premise that the true individual self is

consciousness, it was inferred that the true and ultimate reality must be a universal mind-like consciousness, itself a permanent, unconditioned and unchanging Self or *atman*. According to this theory, the *atman* is the originating or primary principle of all empirical realities. The human person is considered an empirico-transcendental doublet, made of a spiritual mind and physical body. The physical body is subject to birth, decay and death, whereas the mind, like the Cosmic Self, is permanent, unconditioned and unchanging. The *atman* notion corresponds to the concept of the soul in Christian theology.

The cosmos was brought into being by the creative power of the Divine Word "Om", from the Absolute Self. All empirically perceptible things and beings are epiphenomena of the Absolute Self; they are fragments of the primary and undifferentiated "Om". The fragmentary exteriorisations of the Divine Word become corrupted when they are entrapped in matter, and then are subject to its limitations and infirmities. The Self is in all things and beings and retains its identity. The self-identity of individual humans is permanent and immortal. In this idealistic world-view the aim of salvation is to emancipate the little self-*atman* from material and corporeal existence, to re-unite and dissolve it in the Absolute Self. While the little self is trapped in the body, there is incongruence between its consciousness and its existence. There is fear and anxiety, because existence seems to be slipping away from the contingent self. But once the little self is united and absorbed in the Cosmic Self, there is immeasurable and everlasting bliss, because there is a perfect correspondence between consciousness and (its) being. The little self-*atman* of the mystic in ecstasy is experiencing, though only temporarily, the bliss of union with the true Cosmic Self. The method for realising this union, *yoga*, refers to the "yoking of the self to the Self". The *yogi* merely waits for his physical life processes to run their due course so that at death this union will be fully consummated.

In many debates with propagators of the *yogic* method, the Buddha explained why the theory is fallacious and why it does not lead to true and unshakeable liberation from suffering "in this world and in this very physical frame with its perceptions and concepts"

(Samyutta Nikaya II.62). The bliss experienced by the *yogi* is conditioned and temporary. The belief in everlasting *post-mortem* bliss through union with the Absolute Self cannot be empirically verified. Moreover, the Buddha repeatedly pointed out that given determination and perseverance anyone could become adept in these systems of mental training, irrespective of moral character. The teachings of the forest sages who first formulated the *atman* theory were collated and handed down by Brahmin scholars in the Upanishads.

Brahminism is based on the theory that all realities and persons are hierarchically stratified according to their innate nature, as determined by Brahma. This view, though couched in theological terms, is similar to the Aristotelian theory of intrinsic nature. The Greek philosopher also held that all reality is hierarchically organised according to intrinsic natures. From this premise, Aristotle deduced that the inferior status of women and slaves was in accordance with their nature.

The Upanishadic theory of the Absolute Self is similar to Plato's theory of the Absolute Spirit. Plato taught that visible realities are shadowy and partial reflections of Universal Ideas conceived by the Absolute Spirit. The Universal Ideas alone are real, because they are eternal and unchanging. The empirical world is unreal. By extension he, like the Upanishadic philosophers, taught that permanence is real and impermanence is illusory. Brahmin-Upanishadic ideas provided ideological justification for the oppressive caste system and the criminal injustice of untouchability. Similarly, the political philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and their ideas about 'democracy' were applied to justify the inhuman institution of chattel slavery. The Buddha's Teaching was a radical overturning of Platonic-Upanishadic and Aristotelian-Brahmin assumptions.

Chapter 3

The Buddha and His Times

Buddhism arose and spread in an area east of The Doab, covering the Mid-Gangetic Valley, with the Himalayan foothills to the north and the Vindhayan mountain range to the south. In the Buddha's Day this region was called the "Majjhimadesa", or Middle Country. Contrary to the view popularised by nineteenth century Western Indo-ologists, the Brahmins were relative newcomers in the Middle Country, which they at first denounced as "the accursed land of heathens", because it had not been developed under the aegis of the priestly caste. The oppressive Brahmin ideology was frontally attacked by the wandering teachers of sixth century BCE. They rejected the Vedas' authority and dismissed the Brahmins' priestcraft as ritual hocus-pocus. Foremost among the Brahmins' fierce opponents, and undoubtedly the most effective, were the Buddha and his disciples.

The Middle Country in Transition

Beginning around 800 BCE, human ingenuity transformed the Mid-Gangetic Valley from an area covered by dense rainforests and swamps into a prosperous region. The discovery of rice and invention of iron ploughshares enabled sustained food surpluses. This led to the proliferation of occupations, complex division of labour and extensive trade exchanges, which broke down the autonomy of local communities. New types of cities emerged that were not merely the headquarters of a king and his courtiers, but centres for large populations working in administration, craft production and trade. A sizeable money economy developed, giving rise to a new class of city-based merchant bankers. Uniting this vast and heterogeneous society was not religion or language, but commodity production and trade. Individuals could sever the

umbilical cord tying them to the soil and their villages and set out to seek their fortunes abroad. Together with the anonymity of urban life, these conditions led to the rise of individualism. The welfare of the individual, not the welfare of the community, became the central preoccupation of religious and secular discourse.

While these were the dominant characteristics of Majjhimadesa society, they were neither equally nor evenly distributed throughout the region. Beside the federated republican clans and monarchical states with their large cities and extensive trade links, other societies still engaged in simple agriculture were scattered through the land. These were generally tribal societies united by bonds of kinship, grouped and classified by the generic name "Cobras" (*nagas*). Fierce tribes, referred to generically as "Demons" (*yakkas*), inhabited thick rain forests surrounding areas cleared for food production.

Petty chiefdoms either amalgamated or were annexed by power-hungry kings. By the sixth century BCE, four powerful states had emerged and were pitted against each other in a struggle for supremacy. Two of these, the Vajji and Mallan republics located along the Himalayan foothills, were clan-federations. To the south were the powerful monarchical states of Kosala and Magadha. In the monarchical states, private property was a legally recognised institution: the patriarchal household, not the clan, had become the principal unit of ownership and production. The great political drama of the period was the conflict between the tribal federations and monarchical states. By the time Siddhartha Gotama renounced household life, the tiny Sakya republic into which he had been born was annexed and turned into a minor province of Kosala.

The disintegration of clan life produced what Charles Drekmeier calls "tribal trauma" (Drekmeier 11). The breakdown of tribal ethos, the undermining of local customs and cults, the replacement of communal ownership with private ownership and the rise of individualism in religious and wordly affairs necessitated the quest for an ethical system transcending particular views and observances. The Buddha's Day saw a new phenomenon emerge: wandering mendicant teachers organising themselves into schools called *ganas* or *sanghas*. These new teachers addressed issues of concern to all human beings, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, birth and occupation:

what is the meaning of human existence, its origins and its final destiny? By probing beneath the appearance of things, could an ultimate reality or 'essence' underlying the ever-changing appearance of perceivable realities be found? While their answers were different, all these teachers – like the Brahmins – used the word "Dhamma" for the underlying law governing experienced reality.

The rise of the Universal Monarchy and the State on the one hand, and the quest for a universal ethic on the other, can be seen as two different but parallel responses to a new set of social conditions which, according to the Buddha, had "come into being through human action".

The Sanghika Societies

The idea that democratic ideas and traditions were unknown in non-European parts of the world flies in the face of facts. It is certainly not true so far as ancient India is concerned. Critical Indian political philosophers point out that the *sanghika* – 'communistic' societies of ancient India – knew and respected egalitarian practices, even if their extent was limited. In the Buddha's Day, two types of *sangha* existed: the socio-political formations referred to in the Buddhist scriptures as *ganasanghas*, united by kinship and holding their property in common; and, the extra-societal communes of persons who renounced household life, withdrew from civil society, shared a common teaching and discipline, and collectively owned their meagre possessions.

The Buddhist scriptures refer to the ruling stratum of the *ganasanghas* as *ksatriyas*, but these should not be confused with the *ksatriyas* of Brahmin scriptures. The only common feature was that they were a warrior class claiming the right to rule and own property by birth. There is no evidence in the Buddhist scriptures to warrant the conclusion that the *ksatriyas* of Northeast India subscribed to notions of ritual purity and impurity or were adherents of Brahminism. The fourfold stratification of society into *varnas* like those in Brahmanised kingdoms was unknown. There was a simple two-tier division of society between the property owning *ksatriyas*

and a class of domestic workers and wage labourers, *dasakammakaras.* Judging from information in the Buddhist scriptures, this division was not ideologically justified through appeals to innate nature or divine ordination. The purity of *ksatriya* lineage was jealously guarded by clan endogamy, through prohibition of marriage with *dasakammakaras*. However social segregation was not enforced through practices of ritual purity and impurity. The absence of such ritual distinction is indicated by the texts never referring to the labouring classes as *sudras*. The *dasakammakara* classification was functional, not ritual. There was no 'religion' in the sense of veneration of gods. Social cohesion was maintained through kinship, respect of clan traditions and the veneration of ancestors and elders.

The little information we have about *ganasanghas* shows that they embodied egalitarian principles and practices that were more inclusive than among the ancient Greeks or in societies which had come under the ideological hegemony of the Brahmins. Functional differentiation was maintained through the practice of clan endogamy and this, the Buddha insisted, was a social convention, not a divine or natural institution.

From scattered references in the Buddhist scriptures, one can infer that there was greater respect for the dignity of women in these republics than in Brahmanised societies. The Brahmin scriptures encourage men to overpower and rape a woman if she does not freely yield to their sexual demands. In contrast, an elder of the Licchavi-Vajjian federation complained that despite their displays of piety to the Buddha, young Licchavi men were an uncouth lot in the habit of physically harassing young women (Anguttara Nikaya III.75). This complaint would hardly have been made in a culture regarding women as inferior, as mere objects of lust. In the *ganasanghas*, following a matrifocal practice, a beautiful and gifted woman was chosen to symbolise the oneness of the clan. Called the *ganika*, in later periods this term took on the pejorative connotation of courtesan or whore.

In the Maha Parinibbana Sutta the Buddha praises some customs held in high regard by the *ganasanghas*. This narrative begins with a declaration of war by King Ajatasattu of Magadha on the Vajjian

federation. The king declares his determination to utterly crush and destroy this federation, and sends his minister of war to interview the Buddha and gather information that may be useful for his military campaign. The Buddha pointedly rebuffs the minister and ignores the latter's queries. What he does next indicates his concern for the survival of this federation in face of the aggression planned against it by the power-hungry king. He turns to his companion and aide Ananda and inquires whether the Vajji-Licchavi federation adheres to seven principles of good governance and ancient tradition. If they do, the Buddha declares, "they would prosper and not decline". In the context of this text, the following criteria are noteworthy:

1. As long as they hold and participate in regular meetings;
2. As long as they meet in concord, conduct their affairs in concord and disperse in concord;
3. As long as they adhere to their time-honoured traditions and retain their ancient institutions;
4. As long as they honour, respect, revere and heed the advice of their elders; and,
5. As long as they do not abduct women and girls, nor keep them captive.

The Buddha's response to the King of Magadha's intent to destroy the Vajjian federation was to openly state his concern for its welfare. Chafed by the Buddha's rebuff, the royal advisor excused himself and left.

The Buddha specifically mentions respect for the dignity of women as a condition that will ensure a society's moral and material welfare. This is of significance, because the abduction of women was common practice among warriors and is lauded in the Brahmin scriptures. When, for example, the already-married warrior hero of the Mahabharatha, Arjuna, shows an interest in the sister of his military advisor, the demi-god Krishna, the latter urges him: "Abduct my sister, for women do not know what's good for them." The Brahmin scriptures contain numerous passages where the conquest of women by force is recommended and praised. A husband's power over his wife, in Brahmin theory, is based on a primordial right of conquest.

By including respect for the freedom and dignity of women as one condition that would ensure the prosperity of the Vajjian federation and prevent its decline, the Buddha enunciated a criterion by which the level of civilisation in any society can be judged. Centuries later, Karl Marx expressed a similar point of view:

> In the approach to woman as the spoil and handmaiden of communal lust is expressed the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself...From this relationship one can therefore judge humanity's whole level of development (295).

From information in the Buddhist scriptures, it appears that the status of women in the *ksatriya* federations of Northeast India was higher than in societies that had come under Brahmin influence and in the monarchical states of the period. It is therefore not surprising that a group of women from the Sakyan *ganasangha*, led by the Buddha's own foster mother, organised themselves to demand that women be given the same right as men to renounce household life and form a *sangha*. These assertive women no doubt based their demand on one of their time-honoured customs, praised by the Buddha, that women should not be kept by force in domestic captivity. At least in the matter of renouncing household life, adult women obtained the same right to self-determination as men. These mendicant disciples – the female *bhikkhuini* and male *bhikkhu* – are erroneously referred to as "world renouncers". The Pali term for the act of renunciation is "going forth from the household to the homeless life". In the historical context, men and women were in fact renouncing the patriarchal household. It must also be borne in mind that a woman who entered a *bhikkhuni sangha* was not joining a cloistered order of nuns. They were enlisted to perform a public function: that of exemplifying and propagating the ideals of the Dhamma. These *bhikkhuni sanghas* were initially self-governing communes, led by a prestigious "elder sister". Theravada Buddhism has preserved the oldest known feminine 'literature' in history, the Therigatha "Songs of Elder Sisters". In this collection of liberation songs, women speak of perennial feminine sorrow, and how they broke through to freedom and happiness.

Even though despotic kings ruthlessly destroyed the *ganasanghas* of Northeast India, their ideals were preserved in the a-societal *sanghas* founded by leaders, including the Buddha. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, these leaders succeeded in translating their ideals into practice during their lifetimes.

Chapter 4

Basic Premises of the Buddha's Message of Liberation

In the Buddha's Day, the paths to liberation from socially engendered suffering took two forms: practice of *yogic* exercises to attain states of mystical euphoria, and ascetic mortification of the senses to release the 'spiritual self'. The Buddha tried both these paths and found them wanting. After six years relentless investigation and experimentation, he realised that the principal obstacle to true freedom was the notion of the self as a transcendental being independent of its existence. He saw clearly that there is no permanent self, existing independent of a person's actual life processes. The idea of an immortal self, he realised, is born of the desire for self-perpetuation: personally and collectively, in terms of one's gender, social class or ethnic group. The individual self-*atman* and the Absolute Self are products of craving for eternal ego-existence.

The Law of Conditioned Co-genesis

Through his radical epistemo-psychological breakthrough, the Buddha shifted the departure point for investigation from substance thinking to process thinking. As discussed, mainstream ancient Greek and Indian thought posit a contradiction between the appearance of a thing and its underlying reality. The Buddha rejected this distinction as a delusion produced by an illusory perception of actuality. People cling to this delusion not because it is true but because it satisfies their desire for personal immortality.

The Buddha's assertion of the primacy of flux has truly revolutionary sociological implications. It demolishes ideological views that gender, class, caste, ethnic identity or social institutions

are the reflections of eternal and unchanging universal essences or ideas. Indian scholar Y. Balaramamoorty explains how devastating this was to Brahmin pretensions then and now:

> Buddhism raised the slogan of revolt. Everything changes. Nothing is permanent. The varna (caste) system, also is not permanent. Buddha openly attacked in hundreds of his sermons - Brahminical tyranny, the varna system, the monarchy and inequality. His heart melted at the sufferings of the poor. When the Buddha announced that his mission in life was to liberate humanity from suffering, it had a great social significance. All the oppressed and downtrodden - the low castes, the women, the poor, the indebted and the slaves looked upon the Buddha as a great liberator (42).

When the Buddha declared that impermanence is real he was not replacing one dogma with another. He clarified step by step how human beings tend to perceive a kinetic actuality in terms of relatively stable 'beings' and 'things' because of the limitations of their senses. The mind constructs mental representations of perceived forms and reifies them through verbal labels. The mental representation of a thing becomes more real than the 'thing' from which the image was abstracted. The mind then clings to these constructs, the most intractable being the fiction of a permanent ego or self as the sovereign subject of thought and action. This delusion is continuously birthed and re-birthed by desire and craving for ego-maintenance. Once individuals and 'realities' are turned into things in themselves (reification), they can be perceived as bearers of good and evil in themselves, and become objects of either lust or revulsion (fetishisation).

The heart of the Buddha's ethic is the doctrine of *anatta* or "no self". This is a two-edged sword that strikes at the spurious notion of self-subsistent subjects of knowledge and equally self-subsistent objects of knowledge. It also shows the emptiness of Aristotelian theory of substances and innate natures. Clinging to the theory of permanent self and unchanging substances is, for the Buddha, not merely a question of mental error: it is a delusion produced by the desire for power to organise all of reality into a totalising system and claim that this is according to faith, reason or logic. The political

applications of Brahmanic and Aristotelian thought vindicate the Buddha's viewpoint that clinging to the notion of permanent self and of eternal unchanging substances is the principal source of violence in the world (Majjhima Nikaya I.110).

The Buddha was able to unravel this process of reification and fetishisation because of the great discovery he made about the character of human knowledge and desire. He formulated this discovery as the Law of Conditioned Co-genesis: "Paticca Samuppada". The Buddha's Teaching and Ethical Path cannot be grasped without comprehending this law. "He who sees my Dhamma", he said, "sees Paticca Samuppada. And he who sees Paticca Samuppada sees my Dhamma" (Majjhima Nikaya I.191). This discovery puts an end to the age-old debate about Freedom and Necessity. Freedom and Necessity are not irreconcilable opposites. Freedom can be realised not by defying Necessity but through insight into it. Human existence is necessarily conditioned existence. Impermanence is an inevitable law of existence, but the rise and dissolution of phenomena take place according to observable patterns and regularities. With Conditioned Co-genesis as the guideline for investigation, the Buddha showed that phenomena – whether natural, psychological or social – are neither chance happenings nor the creation of a god. They are also not the result of separate individuals' free will. Events arise under specific conditions and they cease with the cessation of these conditions. By eradicating the conditions giving rise to an unwholesome state of affairs, that state can also be prevented. The Buddha called for empirical investigation into actual conditions instead of engagement in abstract speculation about the extra-terrestrial origins and purposes of the universe and human existence.

Towards Universal Friendliness

With his unique insight into the birth and cessation of all perceived realities, the Buddha formulated a radical theory about the character of human action, or *kamma*. He understood and clarified *kamma* as "a creative process, which ripens into effects": there is conditioned activity, but no actors existing independent of their real-life conditions; when these conditions cease, the empirical self ceases to exist, just as "a flame goes out when its supply of fuel is depleted". Because human activities – thoughts, words and deeds – have verifiable effects for oneself, for others, and for the living environment, they have an ethical character. The Buddha did not posit "a ghost in the machine" to explain the practical character of human action, which would have reduced the body to an instrument of an alien being. He used systematic observation and experimentation to deduce that human beings have a highly developed capacity for registering internal and external impulses and for self-regulation, which places them in a unique position among living beings. While other creatures adapt themselves to their environment, humans have gradually fashioned their own. The Buddha did not describe the world in an ontological sense, but with reference to the world humanity constructs through perceptions, concepts, designs and practical actions. The Buddha called for compassion towards all sentient beings because, from his point of view, the difference between animals and humans is one of degree and not kind.

The Buddha, unlike most moral philosophers, began not with subjective intentions but with verifiable effects. The human will is not a transcendental but a conditioned faculty. Human beings are not born into an abstract cosmos, but into the specific conditions produced by pre-existing human beings. He asked human beings to consider the effects of their actions beyond the petty claims of their little egos and act responsibly by purifying their thoughts, words and deeds, so that they could live without causing harm to themselves or others. The Buddha did not try to goad people into morality through a system of rewards and punishments. In fact, the terms "good" and "evil" did not exist in his moral lexicon. He spoke rather of skilful

and unskilful responses to the challenges of the human condition. Buddhism's entire ethical attitude could be summed up as, "Knowing that nothing is permanent and that we must all die, how can we live skilfully, harming neither oneself nor others?"

The answer to this question is given in the Four Noble Truths: human suffering is a problem created by human beings alone, because they seek to escape the inevitability of change, decay and death. Radical Buddhism does not offer escape from these inevitable realities. The liberation offered is from self-constructed suffering. Psychologically, this suffering takes the form of existential anguish, arising when the individual divorces himself or herself from the very conditions of existence and regards them as alien to the real self, as "other-than-the body" and as "external nature". Paradoxically, the ego then puts itself in a double bind by craving for and clinging to the very things it regards as "not self". Craving is expressed and reinforced by ego-centred projects for self-perpetuation, like family, class, caste, nation and other social institutions, which continuously produce (birth) and reproduce (re-birth) the privileges of birth, property and power. But this craving, the Buddha taught, can be eradicated, and there is a method for realising it: The Noble Eightfold Path.

The realisation of *anatta* by eradicating the notion of the self as permanent, unchanging and immortal is not annihilation but the dissipating of a delusion. When achieved, there is an exhilarating expansion of consciousness, as the pigeon-holes into which language has crammed it are demolished. The Buddha called this the "signless deliverance of consciousness", when it becomes "non-representative, limitless and lustrous". Representations of actuality, both linguistic and imaginative, are seen for themselves: representations, not actuality itself. The sense of 'self' and 'other' is dissipated. Both are seen as conditionally co-arising constructs of experience and thought. The Buddha used a precise term to explain the basis of the sense of self and self-identity: *an-anna*, a sense of not-otherness. The individual imagines being itself and by itself, but in fact its assertion of selfhood is conditioned by negating other-ness: "a man is not a woman"; "a Sinhala is not a Tamil". Negate this sense of otherness and the sense of self also ceases. Delusion creates the sense of self-

identity by erasing from consciousness the trace of the self in the other. No longer seen as mutually conditioning-conditioned relationships, but as separate and intrinsically different entities, each can now perceive the other, and other others, as objects in themselves of one's lusts, phobias and hatreds. The other becomes the means rather than the condition of one's self-existence.

Once all culturally constructed barriers between oneself and other others are demolished, what arises spontaneously is an immense sense of *anukampa*, or "compassion" (literally, "pulsating along with"). This experience of *anukampa* produces feelings of universal friendliness – *metta* (*maitriya* in Sanskrit) – towards everything that lives, because all life is experienced as part of a single and unbroken stream. Universal friendliness evokes an attitude of active kindliness towards all beings. The concomitant of *metta* is *ahimsa*: an attitude of non-injuriousness towards oneself and others. Since life is experienced as a continuous flow, one realises that in protecting oneself, one protects others, and that in protecting others, one protects oneself. All livings beings form a single web of life: what one does to the web, one does to oneself. This concrete experience of actuality as unbroken flow is not a mystical experience. It is bare perception of actuality, unmediated by concepts and names. The Buddha described this as *sati*, or "right mindfulness". In the Metta Sutta, the Universal Friendliness Discourse, the Buddha makes clear that *sati* is *metta* and *metta* is *sati* (Sutta Nipata 150). The dichotomy between thinking and feeling is superseded. The realisation of *anatta* does not therefore produce a sense of emptiness but a sense of fullness, as the living being pulsates with feelings of universal friendliness. When the Buddha founded the Fourfold Community, the Buddha Sangha, he envisaged it as the efflorescence of ego-less living: the visible embodiment of universal and inclusive friendliness. The aim of Buddhist self-liberation is not a negative mysticism. The emptiness spoken of by the Buddha is not an ontological void, but the absence of craving in its triple form: lust, hatred and delusion.

Subsequent chapters examine some of the Buddha's discourses, where he applies his basic insights to refute oppressive ideologies and to expose the emptiness of claims that the social order of a given

time was the same in the past and would remain unchanged in the future. The Buddha realised that if people believe permanence is real and change is illusory, they will not even begin to think about changing the conditions in which they find themselves. The Buddha insisted on conditioned co-arising of suffering. His radical prescription for liberation is authentically revolutionary because in it there is co-incidence of self-changing and the changing of conditions

Chapter 5

The Buddha's Declaration of Human Biological Unity

The Vasettha Sutta is an extraordinary discourse in which the Buddha demonstrates and affirms the biological unity of the human species. One realises with a start that this clear and unambiguous declaration was made in the sixth century BCE. The Vasettha Sutta makes the *Ethics* and *Politics* of Aristotle pale into insignificance. Only after the Second World War was the unity and equality of the human race acknowledged, at least in theory, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Buddha gives this discourse in response to a question by two students of Brahmin theology. What does the Teacher Gotama think, they ask, of the doctrine taught by their masters, that the four separate ranks of society are different by birth and that their social positions are an articulation of their separate natures?

In reply, the Buddha invites the two young scholars to descend from the airy heights of theological speculation and take a look at the world around them. That there are an immense variety of life forms in the world is an empirically verifiable fact. There are different forms of plant life that can be classified into separate species by their distinct marks and environments. The same applies to animal life. But when it comes to the human form, he emphasised, there are no marks to indicate that humans are subdivided into separate species:

> Not in the hairs nor in the head
> Not in the ears nor in the eyes
> Not in the mouth nor in the nose,
> Not in the lips nor in the brows
>
> Not in the shoulders or the neck
> Not in the belly or the back
> Not in the buttocks or the breast

> Not in the anus or genitals
>
> Not in the hands nor in the feet
> Not in the fingers nor the nails
> Not in the knees nor in the thighs
> Not in the colour nor in voice
> Birth (*jati*) produces no distinctive marks as with other kinds of birth.
>
> As corporeal beings, there are indeed perceptible differences among humans.
> But the differences spoken of among humans are purely conventional.

The word *jati* has connotations of "birth, race or species". The Buddha exposes and debunks the strategy behind racist and sexist theories, ancient and modern. The human body is morphologically the same. Distinctions are created by selecting one or more features of the body – skin colour, nose shape, texture of hair, genitals – to identify them as 'marks' signifying intrinsic biological differences between culturally and socially differentiated people. Despite the Buddha's unambiguous assertion that all human beings belong to the same *jati*, in Sri Lanka the Sinhalese language uses this term to describe different ethnic and caste groups. The Buddha's preferred term for cultural or ethnic communities was *jana*, or "people".

The discourse continues as the Buddha explains how racist and sexist theories feed on the average person's ignorance and deluded perception of social reality. When a group engages in the same occupation from generation to generation, the illusion arises that a person is a farmer, warrior, priest or ruler by birth. It is because a person practices agriculture that we call him a farmer and *not* a ruler or priest or soldier. Similarly a person who rules is called a ruler and *not* a farmer or priest or soldier. A person who lives by warfare is called a soldier and *not* a ruler or farmer or priest. A person who earns a livelihood by performing ritual acts is called a priest, not a ruler or farmer or soldier. Repeated activities produce the concept of "farmer/ruler/priest/warrior". To claim that an empirically existing peasant, ruler or priest was produced by divine conceptualisation is false. The practical order is antecedent to the conceptual order. Their teachers, the Buddha tells the two Brahmin youths, gave a spurious

explanation for occupational differentiation. It is action, not birth, which differentiates people into occupational groups. If society permits it, anyone born into one occupational group can learn the skills of another group and practise that profession. Neither birth nor divine ordination makes a priest; anyone can pick up the bag of tricks, perform rituals and call himself one. It is culture that prevents people from changing their occupations, not nature, as claimed by the Brahmins. The Buddha sums up his analysis in a pithy philosophical formulation:

> The world is thus become through action (and is) the conditionally co-arisen result of action.

The implication of this analysis is revolutionary. What humans have produced under specific social and historical conditions, humans can also change. What is necessary is insight into the Law of Conditioned Co-genesis, proper investigation of surrounding conditions and right goal-oriented action.

Chapter 6

The Buddha's Theory of Right

In the Vasettha Sutta, the Buddha adopts the synchronic method of investigation and classification, and discloses how the illusion of fixed and unchangeable occupations arises due to social practices repeated from generation to generation. The practice of endogamy in clan societies was adapted by the Brahmins to suit new social conditions. By imposing endogamy on occupational groups, they could argue that occupational specialisation was a function of biology and not a historical development. By making people forget its historical origins, they claimed that their normative social order existed from the beginning of time, when God created Man and produced the four social ranks out of his body.

With Knowledge of Beginnings

The Agganna Sutta adopts a diachronic approach to unravel the origins of the social division of labour. The Buddha uses the Law of Conditioned Co-genesis as a method of historical explanation. The title of this discourse is often translated as a Buddhist 'genesis' story, a convenient term to use so long as "genesis" is not understood as "a beginning out of nothing". The Buddha denied that his explanation refers to spontaneous generation or divine creation. "Genesis" in the Buddha's usage is always conditioned genesis, and human agency is necessarily conditioned agency. *Agganna* literally means "with knowledge of beginnings", and was consciously used to refute the spurious theory of creation propagated by the Brahmins. The Buddha unravels step by step the stages of social evolution that produced the stratified society of his day. He offers a superlative archaeological-genealogical explanation. It is also a study on the archaeology of power, because he explains how power differentials arose with the

emergence of property differences, during a long historical process culminating in the rise of monarchies and the State.

In striking contrast to most Western social theories, the Agganna Sutta does not begin with an assumption that at the beginning of social evolution there were only separate individuals, or as in most patriarchal genesis stories, a solitary male. The Buddha points out that in the beginning there were just "beings". Anthropologists and palaeontologists today agree that the human species spent the greater part of its existence on this planet hunting and gathering. The Buddha begins with human groups in this food-gathering stage. Society at this initial stage – and contemporary anthropology confirms this – was simple and undifferentiated. There was no social differentiation or hierarchy, nor even differentiation between masculine and feminine. (Not to be confused with "sexlessness", as some celibate commentators have piously imagined.) Humans lived as food gatherers for a long period of time, shifting from place to place as local resources were depleted.

A qualitative change took place when food cultivation techniques were invented. Instead of moving from place to place, ever dependent on the spontaneous products of nature, they could settle down and produce their means of subsistence. The consolidating of production and creation of food surpluses changed the character of social relations. The primitive, undifferentiated and egalitarian clan began to disintegrate. Pairing marriage, rather than group marriage, became the norm for biological reproduction. Instead of the clan, the separate household became the basic unit of the new society. The settled way of life and establishment of separate households made possible accumulation and hoarding of goods. People began to grab and store wealth, and anarchic conditions developed. In the earlier clan societies, the means of production, especially land, were held in common and wealth was equitably distributed among all members. Under new conditions it was no longer clear who was entitled to what. Thus the institution of private property was a historical, not natural, necessity. Boundaries were marked to divide the hitherto undivided earth into privately owned plots. Instead of restoring peace, the right to private property further inflamed the greed to accumulate

wealth. Unconscionable individuals grabbed the lands of others by force. The institution of property increased theft, lying and violence.

It was at this stage, when egoism and greed had developed under specific historical conditions, that a central institution to regulate social affairs became a necessity. The Buddha recalls that to maintain peace and ensure just distribution of property the people came together as they had done in the earlier tribal assemblies and proposed:

> Come let us appoint a certain being from among ourselves who would show anger where anger is due, censure those who deserve censure and banish those who deserve banishment! And in return, let us grant him a share of the rice. So they went to the one who was the handsomest, the most pleasant and capable, and asked him to do this for them in return for a share of the rice, and he agreed.

The Buddha then goes on to explain the titles given by the people to their first elected rulers: a ruler's "first and enduring title" was Mahajana-Sammata, the "People's Consensus". The Buddha calls this "the first constituting element". In other words, the title indicates the historical genesis and juridical basis of the right to govern.

The second title and constituting element was Ksatriya. The Buddha states that originally the term meant "Lord of the Fields", a function created by the people, not a divine institution as the Brahmins claimed. The second title defined the nature and limits of a ruler's jurisdiction. He was given powers of "over-lordship" but not rights of proprietorship. Monarchs of the Buddha's Day, however, made proprietary claims by right of conquest. By attributing the original right to rule to a social convention, and not to a privilege of birth or armed conquest, implies that the people have the right to withdraw the mandate if a ruler violates the contract.

The third title and constituting element was Raja. Etymologically, the word means "radiant": this defines the quality that should inform just governance and which gives legitimacy to the rule of the Great Elect. The Buddha states that in the beginning people called a ruler Raja because he was expected to "gladden others with Dhamma". In ancient India it was used variously as the title of a tribal hero-chief, the head of settled agricultural community, the elected head of a

federation of tribes or the monarch of a kingdom. The rulers of imperial states were addressed as Maharaja, "Great King". Raja had come to stand for "radiant power". The Buddha returns to the term's preceding ethical connotation and states that in the beginning people understood it to mean "radiating righteousness".

Since the Mahajana Sammata was freed from productive labour in order to govern the people, he would have no personal means of subsistence. Following the ancient tribal custom of balanced reciprocity, the people decided to remunerate him for the services he agreed to perform on their behalf. Here again, the Buddha provides a socio-genetic explanation for taxation. In the early Rig Vedic period the people belonging to a clan brought their produce to a central pool or treasury, the *kosa*. It was then redistributed in equitable shares, *bhaga*, among all the clans-people. With the emergence of monarchy, the portion allocated to the Raja also came to be called *bhaga*, which in turn came to mean "tax". Similarly, *kosa* came to stand for the royal or state treasury. It is worth noting that originally *bhaga* was a share of the produce, but not the principal means of production, land. According to the Buddha, taxation began as a voluntary tribute for services rendered, but later degenerated into extortion and violent expropriation.

The Buddha's explanation of kingship's origins is in striking contrast to Brahmin theory, which maintains that because of alarming conditions and social anarchy the people turned to the gods for help. Manu agreed to become the humans' ruler on condition that he would receive lavish gifts (grain, animals and the most beautiful of young women) in return for maintaining law and order. The people's fear of social anarchy was used to justify the privileges of a king functioning as guardian of the Brahmanic cosmo-social order, which in turn provided a theological rationale for over-taxation. Brahmin ideologists placed the first kings outside the *varna* scheme; kingship resulted from a separate act of creation. Kings were established in office by a divine legate, a Brahmin priest empowered to anoint rulers. Like the Christian kings' Divine Right, the Brahmin theory provided a *descending analysis of power*. Power and majesty were privileges that the gods deign to share with the sons of their choice, mediated by the priests.

In the Agganna Sutta, the Buddha rejects this mystification of royal power. After recalling the circumstances that led to the Mahajana Sammata's election, he immediately adds that he was "a certain being – *ekam sattam* – chosen from among the people themselves". There is no mention of gender, birth, wealth or armed might as qualifications. The qualities stressed are ethical. The Great Elect was expected to rule justly and "gladden the hearts of his people". The Theory of Constituting Elements (*aksaras*) clarifies the factors by which legitimate power was established; the limits within which legitimate power can be exercised.

Having traced the archaeology of state power, the Buddha further explains the emergence of various occupational groups, with the monogamous household as the principle unit of ownership and production. At each stage marking the emergence of a particular social stratum, including the monarchy and the various occupational groups, the Buddha repeatedly emphasised:

> They originated among these very same beings, like ourselves, no different, in accordance with Dhamma and not contrary to Dhamma.

The Vasettha and Agganna Suttas assert the same universal principle: whether conventionally labelled 'Brahmin', 'king' or 'outcaste', everyone shares a common human nature. They belong to the same *jati*. Birth does not differentiate; the mind and social conventions do.

Theoretical Implications of the Agganna Sutta

1. The Buddha was the first thinker in world history to formulate a theory of contractual power. The Agganna Sutta is the earliest known discourse on politics where the source of state power is traced to popular consensus. Unlike the Western philosophers of the eighteenth century, the Buddha did not argue that a social contract was necessary because the human species consists

essentially of separate and egoistic individuals. The Buddha disclosed that individualism and egoism manifest themselves under specific, historically arisen conditions: the transition from a mobile to a settled way of life after humans had developed techniques for production of their means of subsistence; the breakdown of clan solidarity; and the setting of separate households as the principle unit of ownership and production all changed people's moral sentiments:

> What was once regarded as immoral (the private ownership of the means of production) came to be regarded as moral.

2. The Buddha rejected Brahmin theory about the divine origin of language, which was the basis for their theory of creation. The Brahmins traced language to the creative Word of God. In Brahmin fantasy all realties originate with a Father-God who begot a Word-Son from his mouth. This Divine Word-Son was the exteriorisation of the invisible mind of God. All perceivable realities are fragmentary reflections of the Divine Mind. Every separate individual is a partial, imperfect and finite incarnation of the Divine Word. To know the hidden meaning of a thing or a person, we must know its true meaning as conceived and uttered by the Word. All words are made up of stable sound elements (*aksaras*) that have fixed and immutable meaning, revealed in the Vedas: the Word of God. To understand the meaning and the purpose of everything on earth one must know the Vedas. The Brahmins have been chosen by God to act as custodians and interpreters of the Word; they alone have access to the true meaning determined by God. By tracing the power of their words to God, the Brahmins could claim that their discourse about social order was based on divine revelation.

   Before commencing his genealogical trace of power, the Buddha demolished the Brahmin theory of creation by the Word of God. He provided a historical explanation for the Vedas' origin: language, like society, is a constructed reality. The meaning attached to a word is a social convention, not a divine creation. The Buddha wielded a two-edged sword in the

Agganna Sutta. He undercut not only the Brahmin theological view of society, but also the very language used to substantiate it. The Buddha further ridiculed the notion that Father-Gods could beget Word-Sons from their mouths. The Brahmins, he said, could cook up such a fantasy only by cultivating amnesia about their real origins. However much they might like to forget it, everyone knows that Brahmin women, like those of other social strata, menstruate, conceive, give birth to, and breast-feed their children. These 'vulva born' Brahmins bandying the view that they were conceived in the head of Brahma and born out of his mouth must first come out the nether-mouth of woman before making their silly claims.

By emphasising real origins and rejecting the meaningless practice of ritual re-birth by male priests, the Buddha revalidated the feminine-maternal order which the Brahmins disqualified as intrinsically impure. Birth from woman does not differentiate; king and pauper alike share the same process. Patriarchal, empirically non-verifiable discourse about a creative Word differentiates and sets people against one another, nature does not. In the beginning there is a matrix, not a patrix. The Buddha exposed the fallacy of divine paternal filiation and returned life and consciousness to their feminine-maternal site of origin.

3. From the Buddha's point of view, every just social order must begin by recognising the common species-nature of all human beings. There is no basis for discrimination between human beings before the Law (Dhamma), individually or collectively. This Law is not a social convention or positive legislation enacted by an authority. It is inferred through insight into the conditioned co-genesis of perceived differences. Among humans, these are nominal, not essential. The transformation of perceived differences into substantial differences enables hierarchies of things and beings. Thus, justification of dominance over many by a few can be made to appear 'natural'. Institutionalised violence can be argued as necessary and, according to 'reason', divine and human. From the Buddha's viewpoint, these are

violent reasons masquerading as reasonable violence. He concluded the Agganna Sutta with this declaration:

> Human beings are not different from one another. They are equal, not unequal. This is in accordance with Dhamma.

The Buddha's *ascending analysis of power* demolishes conventional theories of right. Power does not come down from a divine or mysterious source; it is the crystallisation and concentration of relationships developed in society under specific historical conditions. Neither the decentralisation of power nor 'empowerment' of people are necessary, but rather renunciation of power accumulated through gradual appropriation of its circuits, which arose and began to circulate in ever wider circles through society. Oppressive ideologies like Brahminism seek to inscribe dominant-submissive relationships into the consciousness and very bodies of people. The greatest victims of this demonology – that is what this 'theology' of power is – are women, *sudras* and 'untouchables'.

4. The Vasettha and Agganna Suttas together provide the basic principles for formulation of a bill of fundamental human rights:
   - All men and women are equal according to a universal law.
   - Rulers, whether by dynastic succession or election, have been elevated to their positions of power through an original contract with the people. Governments not enjoying a free mandate from the people violate the people's rights and are illegitimate; the people have the right to oust them from power.
   - These truths are in accordance with the Law of Righteousness, to which both rulers and ruled are subject.

The Buddha's trace of power to an original contract suggests he favoured a polity in which rulers are subject to the same Rule of Law as everyone else. In this he anticipated the constitutional monarchies and republics of modern times. The Buddha saw the social miseries spawned by the absolute monarchies of his day. In his youth he was

trained in the art of governance and understood the necessity of containing power within clearly defined legal and moral limits. This is clear from the answer he gave when asked "Who, Master, is the King of Kings?" to which he replied:

> The Dhamma alone is the King of Kings.
> (Anguttara Nikaya III.149)

Chapter 7

The Buddha's Theory of Statecraft

The great kings of Kosala and Magadha were advised by amoral theoreticians of statecraft. In the fourth century BCE the policies and principles developed by successive generations of kings were compiled and systematised by Kautilya, in the Arthasastra. The Buddha's policies for just governance need to be appreciated in the context of the *real politik* in the monarchical states of the Mid-Gangetic Valley. His views on righteous rule are presented clearly and succinctly in the Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta: "The Lion's Roar on the Turning of the Wheel Discourse" (Digha Nikaya III.26). This discourse is presented in popular style, showing it was as much intended for the education of the people as for the instruction of rulers.

Symbolism of the Wheel of Righteousness

The wheel is one of the most ingenious human inventions. It has had a profound impact on practical life, as other inventions grew from the wheel and axle. The original inventors and everyday wielders of wheels were ordinary men and women, working at the spinning wheel, the potter's wheel, the carter's wheel and the grinding wheel. The wheel's power also created the most feared weapon of conquest and destruction in the ancient world: the war-chariot. The wheel became a symbol of more than human power. People imagined that the cyclic reproduction of the cosmo-social order was due to the mysterious turnings of an Invisible Wheel. Historically a tool produced and controlled by working men and women, the wheel was celestialised and transformed into an objective alien force existing outside and above them, beyond their control.

In the non-Brahmanised states of Northeast India, the great kings projected themselves as "wheel turning" cosmocrats empowered to reproduce the cosmo-social order and prevent it from falling back into primordial chaos. These kings were not merely monarchs to whom vassals paid tribute. They had at their command a powerful state apparatus consisting of a centrally controlled administration and salaried standing army owing allegiance only to them. Backed by ruthless rulers and armed men, tax collectors terrorised the countryside. According to the Jataka folk tales, the Birth Stories of the Buddha, the people regarded tax collectors as a scourge and referred to them as "torturers" and "man-eating demons".

The power and prestige of a king's imperial might was symbolised by possession of "seven gems", or insignia. The first and foremost of these was the Wheel of State (from the war chariot), symbolising the right of the king to dominate and rule by physical coercion. The wheel is an evocative symbol of state power because it extends in concentric circles along two axes, one vertical and the other horizontal. Along the vertical axis, at the apex of the social pyramid was the Maharaja, assisted by a council of ministers and the army commander-in-chief. Below were subjugated kings and chiefs of tribes and federations, the governors of provinces and heads of villages. Next to the lowest social stratum were property-owning peasants and artisans. At the bottom of the heap were the propertyless wage labourers and domestic servants. Along the horizontal axis, conquered territories were centrally controlled and secured in a hub of power symbolised by the royal palace. From the palace, power extended in concentric circles through the royal capital; towns; market towns; and rural settlements, where agriculture, livestock breeding and craft production took place. Over this "great wide circle of the earth", the kings proudly claimed to exercise power. The wheel also symbolised the power differential between the centre and periphery. Beyond the rural settlements were the great forests: the habitat of wild beasts and forest tribes, and also where those renouncing life in society withdrew to live in contemplation and asceticism. And the great forests provided a hideout for political opponents, rebel leaders gathering other dissidents to create trouble in border provinces, or organise attacks on the throne.

The Brahmin and early Buddhist attitudes to state power indicate the two schools' contrasting values. The Brahmins were quick to exploit the people's naïve understanding about the basis of monarchical power. Brahmin theoreticians of statecraft list "punitive and coercive force" among their seven indispensable elements of state power. The Buddha, on the other hand, gave the Wheel of State a different significance. He began his teaching career by presenting himself as a new type of hero and conqueror, who had gained mastery over himself, not others. He called his first sermon the "Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma". Through this revaluation, the Buddha formulated not only a general ethic, but an inspiring theory of statecraft as well. He replaced the despotic and amoral principles promulgated by political philosophers of his day with policies imbued with righteous values. He called upon kings to abandon violence and to turn themselves into noble – *ari*ya – turners of the Wheel. The Brahminsdentified nobility with birth, property and power. The Buddha took this valuation of nobility and gave it a new worth. The true *ariya*, he pointed out, are the morally unimpeachable. The real *candala* is the grossly immoral person. A king could claim to be *ariya* by birth, but morally be a *sudra* or *candala* by his actions.

The Lion's Roar of the Wheel Turning King

The Buddha begins his morality tale by recalling that a long time ago there lived a Noble Wheel-Turner monarch named Dalhanemi, the "Well Girded" (in righteousness). He was a *cakkavatti dhammiko dhammaraja*: a wheel turning, righteous king of righteousness. This king ruled over the entire earth, from ocean to ocean, "without the sword and without the rod, but righteously". The rod and the sword symbolise monopolisation of violence by the king. In patriarchal culture, the rod or sceptre is also a symbol of phallic power. By ruling "without the sword and the rod", the righteous king had renounced despotic patriarchal power. The Noble Wheel Turner was in possession of the seven gems of power. In the Buddha's revaluation, the first of these attributes, the Heavenly Wheel, does not descend from the skies. As we shall see, it ascends to its place in

the heavens through righteous rule and functions as guardian and guarantor of righteousness in the kingdom

After a period of just rule, King Dalhanemi decides to make a significant innovation. He appoints "a person", *ekam sattam*, to act as Watchman of the Wheel and to report to him if the Wheel were becoming unsteady. The laconic *ekam sattam* shows indifference to privileges of birth, gender, wealth or status. What mattered was whether the person would conscientiously perform the duty.

Duties of a Righteous Ruler

After a long period of time, the watchman reports to the king that the Wheel has slipped a little. The king, now well advanced in years, has not deviated from righteousness, but the omen suggests that age is weakening his control over state affairs. In ancient India, as elsewhere, kings tended to cling to power even when senility made their rule ineffective. Impatient princes often committed parricide to usurp the throne. The Arthasastra warns kings that, "princes, like crabs, are father eaters"; kings should be ever vigilant and guard themselves against the machinations of any heir apparent. The next chapter advises the heir how to circumvent his father's precautions and capture the throne (Kosambi 1977: 144-145). The Buddha recommends a different policy. The Watchman warns the king that the Wheel is unsteady. The king sees it as a sign that the time has come for him to retire; he abdicates to his heir. The transfer of power takes place through the formal handing over of the seven gems. The old king retires to the forest to devote his last years to meditation.

The ascent of the new king to the throne is marked by the dramatic disappearance of the Wheel. The watchman informs the new incumbent of this portent. Without the Wheel, the king would lose his power to rule credibly. Disturbed by the Wheel's disappearance, the young king hastens to his father to seek an explanation for the strange phenomenon. The stage is set for the Buddha to present his own views on governance through the mouth of the royal sage. The opening sentence thunders like a lion's roar

against rulers who use their birthright and religious ritual to mystify the legitimacy of their rule:

> The Heavenly Wheel Treasure, my son, is not a paternal inheritance.

Considering the period when it was made, this is a truly astonishing statement. Until recent times, all over the world the right to rule was regarded as a birthright. The Buddha, through the mouth of the royal sage, states that societies may have various conventions for deciding who will rule over them: dynastic succession is one such convention; this gives a legal right to rule. But the seal of legitimacy has to be earned through righteous rule. The disappearance of the Wheel symbolically expresses this. The new king asks his father how he can regain the Wheel and is told:

> You must, my son, turn yourself into an Ariyan Wheel-Turner.

The young king asks: "In what way, Sir, must an Ariyan Wheel-Turner turn the Wheel?" Again through the royal sage, the Buddha presents his views on statecraft:

> It is this, my son:
> Yourself depending on the Dhamma; honouring the Dhamma;
> Revering the Dhamma; cherishing the Dhamma;
> Doing homage to the Dhamma; and, venerating the Dhamma.
> With the Dhamma as your Badge; with the Dhamma as your Banner;
> Acknowledging the Dhamma as your Master,
> You should establish guard and protection, according to Dhamma,
> For your household, your nobles and vassals,
> For Brahmins and householders, town and country folk,
> Samanas and Brahmins, for beasts and birds,
> Let no unrighteousness prevail in your kingdom and *to those who are in need give wealth* (emphasis added).

What the royal sage enunciates is a concise but comprehensive state policy embracing all sentient beings. The Buddha begins by re-valuing all the conventional insignia of royal power and making

them signifiers of righteousness. The State is morally obliged to protect and foster the welfare not only of humans but also of the beasts and birds in its territory. In establishing "guard and protection", the new king is admonished to be vigilant about the practice of righteousness in his kingdom: "Let no unrighteousness prevail in your kingdom." The royal sage immediately mentions the one policy of state by which the righteousness of any government must be judged: *to those who are in need, distribute wealth.* Following his father's advice, the young king conscientiously performs the duties of an Ariyan Wheel-Turner and the Wheel reappears in the heavens. Having established himself in righteousness, the Noble Wheel-Turner resolves to spread righteousness throughout his realm.

Establishing the Legitimacy of Government

In describing how a just king spreads righteousness, the Buddha presents a counter-model to the Brahmin ideal that was enacted through the liturgy of the Horse Sacrifice. His listeners would have been familiar with this bizarre rite and would have grasped this revaluation of ethics. The rubrics of the Horse Sacrifice are recorded in the Brahmin scriptures, enabling us today to appreciate the revolutionary character of the Buddha's teaching on statecraft.

The Horse Sacrifice was unabashed glorification of violence and warfare, the subjugation of working people and degradation of women to the status of child-baring vessels and objects of masculine lust. At the prelude to a military campaign a pure-breed stallion would be unloosed and driven into enemy territory. Regarded as an incarnation of Indra – the god of warfare – the horse would be followed by the king and his fourfold army consisting of elephant, horse, archery and infantry brigades. A rival allowing the horse free passage was deemed to have surrendered to the invader. If passage was denied or resisted, war would break out. After a victorious campaign, the horse was brought back to an esplanade and tied to a post. An obscene and revolting ritual followed, beginning with exchange of lewd remarks between the presiding priests and the

king's chief consort and her female escorts. After this build up of sexual tension, the horse was forced to lie down, covered with a gold cloth and suffocated to death. Thereafter, the king's chief consort was required to lie down beside the dead animal and press the equine phallus into her vagina, while begging it to lay its divine seed inside her. Once this union of queen and beast was completed, the horse was offered as a burnt sacrifice to Indra. Its marrow was extracted, cooked and offered to the king, who breathed in the fumes, symbolically taking in the virility of the stallion and by extension, that of the warrior god.

The Buddha recast this sordid ritual in terms of righteousness and non-violence. The Wheel of Dhamma replaces the war horse. Accompanied by his fourfold army, the king approaches the Wheel and exhorts it:

> May the noble Wheel-Treasure roll on! May the noble Wheel-Treasure conquer!

The Wheel rolls across the four quarters of the earth, followed by king and army, until the entire kingdom is brought under the reign of righteousness. Whatever territory the Wheel enters, the rulers and people see it as a harbinger of righteousness and peace. They welcome the king with enthusiasm, freely submit to his rule and seek instruction from him. The king gladly complies and instructs his subjects in the Five Precepts: do not take life; do not take what has not been given; do not abuse pleasures of the senses; do not make wrong use of speech; do not take intoxicating substances. In a radical reversal of the invader's war cry, "Woe to the conquered!" the righteous king tells his subjects, "Continue to enjoy your possessions as you have been accustomed to do." Having established the Rule of Righteousness throughout the Four Quarters, the King returns to the royal city, led by the Wheel. The Wheel then stands in front of the Judgement Hall, lighting up the king's chambers.

There follows a long line of righteous kings, until an ascendant to the throne decides to abandon the noble traditions of his ancestors. He does not seek the advice of his father, the royal sage, nor counsel of the moral guardians. He uses his army to consolidate rule and begins "*to rule the people according to his own ideas*". As a result,

"the people did not prosper so well as they had done under the previous kings". With the king departing from righteousness, moral degeneration gradually sets in and engulfs the whole of society. The Buddha traces these conditions to a single root cause: the unjust king "*did not give wealth to the needy, and as a result poverty became rife.*"

Moral Decline of Society

Applying his basic explanatory principle of conditioned co-genesis to social analysis, the Buddha discloses how with maldistribution of wealth and the rise of poverty other unwholesome social conditions surface and proliferate. Following their ruler's example, the people become indifferent to the plight of the poor and begin to take what is *not given:*

> As the taking of what was not given increased, the use of weapons increased, from the increased use of weapons, killing increased.

The king thinks he can pacify society not by tackling the root cause of poverty, but by trying to alleviate it through charity. This only makes the cunning lazy; they turn dependence on state handouts into a way life. Poverty continues to spread and with it, plunder and killing. Deprived of food, the poorest are reduced to eating wild grasses. Widespread hunger and malnutrition has a dramatic impact on the people's health. Their physical comeliness and longevity decline; children begin to die prematurely. In the absence of moral restraint, people follow their impulses: even members of the same family burn with lust for one another. Sexual violence and incest become commonplace; girls who have just attained puberty are violated and become pregnant. The breakdown of morality is such that people no longer understand its meaning.

As greed, lust and violence become rampant, people burn with fierce animosity towards one another. They feel no compassion "just as a hunter feels no pity for the beast he stalks". With the downward spiral of morality, society is plunged into what the Buddha calls "a

sword period". Basic human values disappear and people are filled with a brutish sense. Armed with swords and knives, with hatred in their hearts, people attack each other shouting: "This is a wild beast! Kill! Kill!"

Moral Renewal of Society

The Buddha pins his hopes on a minority with the courage "to go against the current" and lift society out of its moral morass. Amid rampant immorality, greed and violence, a few say to themselves: "Let us not kill or be killed by anyone!" These dissenters opt out of society and retire to the wilderness, where they reflect on the tragedy overcoming the society they have left: divided into conflicting interest groups, each side denying the humanity of the other.

After a period of reflection and self-transformation, these renouncers come out of seclusion. They meet with others who, like themselves, fled the insanity of society. No longer filled with hatred, without the old social differences and labels to divide them, they embrace and greet each other, saying: "Good being, how happy I am to see you are alive!" They see each other only as fellow human beings and not according to categories of gender, status – *candala, sudra, vaisya, ksatriya* or *brahma* – or national identities, such as Vajjian, Sakyan, Magadhan or Kosalan.

Become aware of their common humanity, the 'new humans' resolve to create a new society. The first step on the way to social renewal is the common resolve: "Let us renounce the taking of life." Beginning with respect for life, the small moral vanguard proceeds to produce wealth justly and share it equitably. The example begins to have an impact on society at large. With wealth being shared, poverty disappears, and with it plunder, killing and licentiousness. Gradually, society begins to prosper again and a vigorous urban civilisation emerges, built on solid moral foundations. The morally healthy society produces physically healthy people, with comely bodies and long life spans. But the Buddha does not say that in this 'paradise' the bodies of people would be spiritualised and that they would become immortal. Even in the most perfect of societies, the

law of *anicca* will prevail, for while living under conditions most favourable to and worthy of their human dignity, they will still be subject to three limitations: physical needs, indispositions and decay. The true realm of freedom can blossom if people live according to Dhamma, but always with this realm of necessity – impermanence – as its basis. The Buddha did not make promises he could not keep, nor raise hopes he could not fulfil. He remained resolutely and realistically on 'this-side' of the threshold of hope.

Moral decline began when the king departed from righteousness. Its renewal began not from above but from below. As a result, the people got what they earned; a just ruler named Sankha. As if to crown the people's efforts, a Maitriya Buddha – a Buddha of Universal Friendliness – appeared in their midst accompanied by a community of saintly mendicants.

Theoretical Implications of the Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta

1. As in several other discourses, the Buddha repeatedly stressed that the wellbeing of a society depends largely on the moral character of those who claim to be its elite, especially religious and political leaders. The moral degeneration of society began when the king deviated from righteousness:

   > When *brahmanas* (moral guardians) deviate from Dhamma, the guiltless bleed. And with Dhamma brought to nought, nobles war with nobles, peasants with traders, husbands and wives despise each other... (and everyone) falls into the power of lust (Sutta Nipata vs.385).

   > When kings are righteous, ministers are righteous. When ministers are righteous, householders, townsfolk and villagers are righteous, When society is righteous the nature-gods would look benignly and favourably on humankind and the rains would fall in due season. The crops would ripen in due season. And human beings who depend on these crops would live long, strong and free from disease (Anguttara Nikaya II.85).

2. Social disintegration and decadence began when the king decided to establish only "watch and ward" (coercive power) for the internal and external security of his kingdom. Unconcerned about the disappearance of the Wheel, the king began to "to rule according to his own ideas". This is an accurate description of despotism, which Thomas Paine defined as "aggressive government accountable only to itself" (in Keane 47). Rulers who, like the unjust king of this discourse, place themselves above universal norms of justice and righteousness are despots. So-called Buddhist leaders who usurp the Teaching of the Buddha and claim that their aim is to establish a righteous society while blatantly flouting its noble values are guilty of a heinous sacrilege. They and the religious leaders providing them with ideological cover seem to have forgotten the first axiom pronounced by the Buddha in this discourse: the epithet of righteousness cannot be arbitrarily appropriated; it has to be earned by righteous practice. They must first "depend on Dhamma, revere Dhamma, cherish Dhamma - take Dhamma as the Badge and the Banner of society".

3. A just constitution should accord with the Five Precepts. These are presented not as 'Buddhist' laws, but as indispensable ethics for all societies, irrespective of religious label. The first right on which all others depend is the Right to Life. This right becomes a platitude if the conditions necessary to safeguard and promote life are absent. Social decline began when wealth was not shared with the needy. The second precept, "do not take what has not been given", is the logical concomitant of the first, "do not take life". The second precept is generally translated as "do not steal", but its implication is somewhat different to what is understood by "theft", implying "taking what belongs to another". The notion of theft is based on the assumption that private property is an inalienable right. The Buddha used the compound term *adinnadana*, where *adinna* means "not given" and *adana*, "taking, seizure, appropriation". The practice of seizing what was not freely given began when the custom of equitable wealth

distribution was abandoned for want of sanction by an unjust king. What the Buddha advocated was *dana*, literally "sharing". The word subsequently came to denote "almsgiving" or "charity" practised with the selfish intention to gain invisible merit. The shift of moral sentiment from distributive justice to charity was first inculcated by the Brahmins; later it also became part of Buddhism.

4. A radical Buddhist understanding of "theft" must be comprehended in the context of *dana* as wealth sharing. Poverty did not arise from natural causes; it co-arose with refusal to practise true *dana*, which originally meant sharing wealth. The Buddha was perhaps the first thinker who came to the radical conclusion that poverty is the result of theft.

5. The Buddha was not a naïve moralist. He recognised that a country must be protected from external aggression and internal disorder. The just king was always accompanied on tours by his fourfold army. But the Buddha understood that despotism is perpetuation of war for the internal conquest of society. His just king did not see 'the rod and the sword' as the principal instruments of government; he engaged in conquest to create conditions in which the affairs of state would be conducted justly, with informed participation of his subjects. In this situation the armed forces were necessary only to defend the kingdom from external threats.

   The Buddha knew from experience that state powers could degenerate into an instrument of oppression if citizens are not vigilant. Brahmin theoreticians listed a "well fortressed city" among their seven elements necessary for consolidating royal power. The Buddha recognised that constant vigilance is the price of peace, but extended this to include moral vigilance. He recommended of a new type of sentinel. The just king ruled by paying homage to Dhamma, but even he needed a built-in safeguard, lest he become complacent. The king therefore took the initiative to appoint the Watchman of the Wheel and inform him if it became unsteady. Despotism began when the

watchman's warning that the Wheel had disappeared from its place was ignored.

Discussing the fledgling United States democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville warned that democratically elected governments could easily become despotic. As John Keane notes:

> de Tocqueville was never tired of repeating the point that the `independent eye of society' – an eye comprising a plurality of interacting, self-organised and constantly vigilant associations, is neccessary for consolidating the democratic revolution (66).

The sentinel-function recommended by the Buddha reveals his great political sagacity. Even an Ariya Cakkavattin needs critical monitoring. Governments denying the importance of a sentinel-function that cannot stand scrutiny from "the independent eye of society" are by definition despotic. On the other hand, a government desirous of just constitutional rule would not only permit but encourage monitoring by an independent body of citizens.

6. The Buddha did not condone double-morality prescribing one set of standards for the public life and another for the private life of rulers and politicians. In anticipation of contemporary calls for independent and non-corrupt judiciary and transparency in governance, the Wheel positioned above the Palace of Justice illuminated the courts of justice and inner chambers of the royal palace.

7. The Ariya Cakkavatti King was portrayed as preferring decentralised government, where the regions of state enjoy considerable autonomy. Visiting various parts of his kingdom, the people welcome him with joy. He in turn assured them that they could continue "to enjoy what they had, as before". At times of rebellion in border provinces, the Buddha suggested that if kings would rule righteously, the people would freely and gladly accept their authority.

8. The Buddha's legend of the Noble Wheel Turner and Brahmin myth and ritual of the Horse Sacrifice offer two different theories of right. The Brahmins define legitimate right to rule in terms of conquest and subjugation; the Buddha traces it to an original social contract. The two theories advocate radically opposite political practices. Michel Foucault discusses the two models' juridical implications in *Power/Knowledge*. He begins with Clausewitz' famous axiom: "War is a continuation of politics by violent means":

   > Clausewitz' assertion has a triple significance: in the first place, it implies that the relations of power that function in a society such as ours essentially rests upon a definite relation of forces that is established at a determinate and historically specifiable moment in war and by war. Furthermore if it is true that political power puts an end to war, that it instils, or tries to instil, the reign of peace in civil society, this by no means implies that it suspends the effects of war or neutralises the disequilibrium revealed in the final battle. The role of political power, on this hypothesis is to perpetually re-inscribe it in social institutions, in economic inequalities, in language, in the bodies themselves of each and everyone of us (90).

   Western colonising powers built vast empires justified by right of conquest based on a divine mandate to colonise, Christianise and civilise non-European peoples. During the same period, philosophers and political activists were agitating for democracy in their nation-states. The Western powers were applying double standards in political practice: one at home and another abroad. This double standard was based on two contrasting approaches to the analysis of power. Foucault clarifies the two models' implications:

   > The first, found in the philosophies of the eighteenth century, is the conception of power as an original right [of the individual] that is given up in the establishment of sovereignty, and the contract as the matrix of political power, providing its points of articulation. A power so constituted risks becoming oppression whenever it over extends itself, whenever - that is - it goes beyond the

> terms of the contract. Thus we have contract- power, with oppression as its limit, or rather as the transgression of this limit...
>
> In the other system or approach, one no longer tries to analyse political power according to the schema of contract-oppression, but in accordance with that, of war-repression, and, at this point, repression no longer occupies the place that oppression occupies in relation to the contract, that is, it is not abuse, but is on the contrary, the mere effect and continuation of a relation of domination. In this view, repression is none other than the realisation, within the continual warfare of this pseudo peace, of a perpetual relationship of force. Thus we have two schemes for the analysis of power: the contract-oppression schema, which is the juridical one, and the domination-repression or, war-repression schema. The pertinent opposition [in the latter] is not between the legitimate and the illegitimate, as in the first schema, but between struggle and submission (91-92).

Though presented in symbolic terms, the Horse Sacrifice and the Wheel of State represent two contrasting philosophies of right corresponding to Foucault's contra-positioning of the war-repression model and contract-oppression model. The Buddha clearly advocated the contract-oppression model. As noted earlier, the Jataka Stories are the only literature from ancient India recording the rebellions of people against oppressive rule. These insurrections are not condemned as acts of terrorism but are presented as revolts against unjust rulers who have violated their compact with the people.

9. In the Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta the Buddha talks about moral decadence and the raw human suffering – *dukkha* – which co-arises with it. Suffering in the Buddha's Day was not merely mental distress experienced by the affluent pondering the vicissitudes of life and their personal frustrations. In vivid language, the Buddha describes the enormity of hardship among ordinary men and women. He saw people floundering in a sea of miseries and his response was not disgusted ascetic withdrawal, but compassionate engagement to end this suffering. Buddhist scholars tend to discuss *dukkha* in abstract terms, as if it were a

philosophical problem, not a situation-specific condition. As Debiprasad Chattopadyaya explains:

> In order to see the significance of the rise of Buddhism, we have to remember that the early monarchs in their frantic drive for conquest and expansion, were systematically annihilating the surviving free tribes. And within the orbits of their direct domination new phenomena - greed, brutal sensuality, sordid avarice, selfish plunder of common possessions - phenomena that were unknown to the tribal life recently left behind, were emerging. It was at such a critical period of history that the Buddha came forward and said he had found the real solution to the problem of suffering (1981: 468).

Chapter 8

The Buddha's Economic Philosophy

The Buddha understood that political rights would be meaningless without practical expression in a people's right to life and livelihood. The Buddha's views on political economy are formulated in the Kutadanta Sutta. Here too, a profound economic philosophy is cast as a parable so ordinary men and women could easily grasp it. Applying his pedagogical method of re-valuing prevalent ethics, the Buddha rejects and redefines the theology of sacrifice, which establishes an intrinsic link between violence and the Sacred to justify real suffering in the world, especially that of the poor and oppressed. The Brahmin priest-theologians (their ilk is manifold) argued that bloodletting in ritual sacrifices was necessary to appease the gods, whose divine majesty was affronted by sinful humans. The divine thirst for vindictive justice had to be satiated before the gods would bestow graces on human beings. A blood sacrifice's cathartic purpose is sociological, not theological. It turns suffering into a sacred mystery and the bloodletting serves as an outlet for the endemic violence of society which might erupt suddenly in irrational forms. Ritual sacrifices are aimed at containing this violence and channelling it into a sacred purpose. The Buddha saw through this priestly stratagem and went to the heart of the rotten matter mystified by theology. Instead of religion's pseudo-solutions, he called for eradication of social injustice held falsely and mendaciously as a manifestation of divine justice, or the workings of a *kammic* law.

The Horse Sacrifice mentioned above was among several types of fire sacrifice the Brahmins devised to justify privations borne by working people for the benefit of the priestly, aristocratic and royal classes. Human sacrifice had largely been abandoned, even though in Brahmin myth, as we have seen, the social order was established through the sacrifice of a male hero. Each organ had to function

mutely for the welfare of the entire mystical body, of which the Brahmins and god Brahma came from the head. The stomach-born (*vaisya*) and feet-born (*sudra*) had to obey the divinely appointed powers-that-be; wanting to be like the wealthy and powerful would be as absurd as the stomach and feet of the physical body wanting to take the place of the head or shoulders.

The fire-sacrifices entailed animal slaughter and sacrifice to the god Brahma. The ritual fire was presented not merely as a symbol but as the real presence of the fire-god Agni. According to Brahmin sacramentology, at the moment of sacrifice god and priest became one. These fire sacrifices were in reality celebrations of priestly and royal greed, as they were formal occasions for extorting wealth from the producing classes. The working people were forced to offer the best animals, produce of the land, and even their daughters as tribute to kings and as ritual payments to officiating priests. The fire sacrifices had become an intolerable burden on the people, already weighed down by an oppressive taxation system. The Buddhists' campaign has to be understood not as criticism of one 'religion' by another. It was a powerful social movement to liberate people from the grip of an unjust and inhumane institution. Due to the relentless efforts of the Buddhists, among others, these public liturgies were largely abandoned and finally banned by the Buddhist Emperor Asoka. Perceiving the threat posed by this new morality, the Brahmins gave up eating beef and in typical mystification of their motive, declared the prohibition a divine taboo because the cow is a sacred animal! By contrast, the Buddha gave a realistic explanation:

> Cattle are our friends... they give us food, strength, freshness of complexion and happiness. Knowing this, Brahmins of old did not kill cattle (Sutta Nipata 295).

Political Economy

The Kutadanta Sutta (Digha Nikaya 5) is a fine example of how early Buddhists targeted oppressive liturgies passed off as sacred rites ordained by the gods. The title of the discourse, Kutadanta, means "sharptooth", indicating the incisiveness of early Buddhist polemics against Brahminism. It is the nickname of the Brahmin priest to whom this discourse is given, aptly characterising the greedy fire-priests as vampire-like creatures sucking the people's blood.

The discourse tells a story within a story to clarify the early Buddhist approach to political economy. Kutadanta is a wealthy quasi-feudal landowner enjoying the rights of a king over a village and its inhabitants. But Kutadanta is an anxious man; he fears that he is losing grip on the people, and thereby his providers of wealth and services, because of their enthusiastic acceptance of the Buddha's Teaching. The priest decides to accost the Buddha and attack him for his 'subversive' teachings. The Buddha receives the bad humoured priest cordially and explains why he rejects blood-sacrifices by narrating a parable about a despotic king.

The story begins with the king surveying with great satisfaction the vast territories conquered and "wealth upon wealth" accumulated in the royal treasury and granaries. But he is filled with anxiety when he contemplates the possibility of being ousted by an equally ambitious and ruthless rival. He could also die an untimely death from natural causes. Fear and anxiety make the monarch religious; he decides to commission a great sacrifice to the gods. He summons his palace chaplain and seeks advice on how to organise a splendid fire-sacrifice. Through the royal chaplain, the Buddha presents his views on political economy. As mentioned, oppressive taxation and the demands of the fire-priests had become unbearable for the working people. The royal chaplain, unlike the arrogant king, is well aware of the real state of affairs in the kingdom. He therefore tries to persuade the king to give up his foolish idea:

> Your majesty, the countryside is infested with brigands. In the border areas, you are facing an insurrection because of excessive taxation. If you were to extort more wealth for a

> lavish religious spectacle, the entire kingdom could break out in open rebellion.

The king haughtily replies that if the people rebelled he would unleash his troops and "eradicate this plague by executions and exemplary punishment". The chaplain points out that this would be a short-sighted remedy for a grave social problem. The king would merely drive resentment underground and those surviving the war of extermination would rise up against him again. Instead of violent repression, the chaplain recommends a saner course of action:

> If you follow this plan you will be able to put an end to social unrest on a permanent basis: provide seed-grain to those engaged in agriculture and pasture land to livestock breeders; give capital to those engaged in trade and pay a just wage to government servants. When the people are gainfully engaged in occupations of their preference the country will prosper and no harm will come to your kingdom. This is the best sacrifice your majesty can perform.

Compared to the amoral political advisers of the period, this was a new type of royal chaplain. The king decides to try this new type of sacrifice. The state incentives stimulate economic activity. Bribery and corruption among government officials come to an end. Wage labourers, till then driven to work "by threats and blows, their gaunt faces covered with tears" were now given the freedom "to do work that satisfied them and no one was forced to do work that did not please them". The people become happily engaged in their chosen occupations; the kingdom prospers and peace is restored. People live without fear, with doors and windows of their houses open wide, "joyfully dancing their children in their arms".

The social elite – provincial chiefs and the wealthy property owning classes – impressed by the king's new policy, decide to follow his example. They voluntarily bring their surplus wealth and place it at the king's disposal. The king tells them to take it back, as he had acquired sufficient wealth "through just taxation" to run the state institutions. The elites decide that it is not right for them to retain excess wealth for private consumption. Instead of hoarding it, they set up permanent reserves in their various districts, to be

ploughed back into production or used in times of natural calamities. Their moral transformation is described by the Buddha through a masterly play of words: the Lords of Wealth – *dhanapatis* – had become Lords of Sharing – *danapatis*. The ancient practice of *dana* as equitable wealth distribution had been restored. In this sacrifice, the Buddha observed, no animals were slaughtered, no trees felled and no plants or grasses destroyed. This, the Buddha concluded, is the true meaning of sacrifice: not the glorification of gods but the creation of a humane society.

The Buddha's economic vision steers a Middle Path that goes through and beyond the two models debated by contemporary economic planners: total control of production by the State, or the *laissez faire* approach, which gives freedom to market forces that are in reality forces of desire. The Buddha recommends that the State should intervene and establish justice and equity to stimulate the productive skills of all, according to a rational plan that will ensure the "welfare and happiness of the *bahujana*", the manifold subjects of the State. Instead of anarchic production, he advocates regulation of economic activity according to a rational plan implemented with the full and free cooperation of all. The Buddha did not share the pessimistic view that human beings are by nature egoistic creatures and that economic growth must necessarily take the form of a war of all against all. Human beings can infuse economic activity with better values than greed and violence. The Buddha did not moralistically deplore the miseries of the political and economic system while enjoying its benefits. He presented a solution to the problems of social inequality, and the unrest and armed insurrections it inevitably gives rise to. The eminent historian of Indian civilisation D.D. Kosambi has correctly assessed the political genius of the Buddha and the perennial relevance of his vision, couched in plain and simple language in the Kutadanta Sutta:

> This is a startlingly modern view of political economy. To have propounded it a time of Vedic *yajna* [sacrifice] to a society that had just begun to conquer the primeval jungle was an intellectual achievement of the highest order (1977: 111).

Domestic Economy

The Buddhist scriptures contain empirical descriptions of social relationships in monarchies of the time, without suggesting that this state of affairs corresponded to a normative social order. The heads of the principal units of ownership and production in society were called *gahapati*. A *gahapati* was also the main provider of revenue to the government and is included among the seven gems of a Noble Wheel Turner monarch. The power of a *gahapati* over his household is described by the same term used for the sovereign power of a monarch over his kingdom or a baron over his estates: *ajjhavasati*. This shows the power of a *gahapati* was both patriarchal and monarchical. It essentially corresponds to Aristotle's definition of the patriarchal household. His *Ethics* and *Politics* contain a form of Greek Brahminism because they are based on the unproven assumption that social roles are manifestations of innate nature. According to Aristotle, the patriarch exercises monarchical power over his household. The marital relationship is the juridical expression of the natural subordination of female to male. The slave is "according to his nature" and "natural destiny" meant to be a slave. The patriarch by natural right exercises despotic power over his slaves. Like the Brahmins, Aristotle held that there is a natural hierarchy of all living beings, in which the naturally inferior exist for the sake of the naturally superior.

The Buddha's teaching on domestic economy is a challenging charter for social emancipation compared to the crude will-to-power underlying Brahmin theology and Aristotelian philosophy. Two centuries before Aristotle, the Buddha examined and exposed the emptiness of the theory of innate natures and permanent substances. Just as he gave a new significance to the Wheel of State, so too the Buddha redefined the power of the *gahapati*. An *ariyan*, or morally noble *gahapati*, "having overcome greed and miserliness, rules through generosity and is a ready helpmate to the needy" (Samyutta Nikaya V. 351).

The Buddha's advice to the *gahapatis* has been preserved in the Sigalovada Sutta (Digha Nikaya 31). It is worth noting that in this discourse, the Buddha calls the rules of conduct he gave *gahapati*s

"Vinaya", the same term used for the disciplinary rules that he laid down for his mendicant discipl. Though the advice given to householders has not been compiled as a separate book, like the Vinaya for the mendicants, it is fair to say that the Buddha gave his followers one Dhamma and two Vinayas: one for renouncers and one for disciples with economic and political power.

As in the case of the political economy, the Buddha's views on the domestic economy are given in the form of a pedagogical story. The Buddha encounters a young man who having finished his morning ablutions in the River Ganges, with clothes dripping engages in some ritual observances, as people in India do to this day. The Buddha asks the young man what he is up to. The young man replies that he has just inherited *gahapati* status after his father's death and is performing morning rituals as taught by his father, worshipping the Six Quarters of the Cosmos – North, South, East, West, Apex and Base – to invoke the blessings of the powers-that-be for the success of that day's activities. The young man's cosmic religiosity, needless to say, is self-centred.

The Buddha, in a remarkable revaluation of the young man's cosmos, instructs him on worship of the true Six Quarters. His religious consciousness has been conditioned by a sense of awe for mysterious forces of nature. He is blindly following the traditions of his forefathers. The Buddha symbolically adopts him into the kinship of the new nobility. The adopted son is re-educated to look beyond the narrow circle of his kith and kin and become aware of the totality of social relationships in which he lives. The young *gahapati* is reminded that in real life he is situated at the hub of six interdependent, or conditioned-conditioning, social relationships. The true 'East' is the parent-child nexus; the 'West', that of husband and wife; the 'South', teacher and pupil; the 'North', relations between friends; 'Apex', the relationship with the moral guardians of society; 'Base', the relations of production, consisting of the *gahapati*, his wage labourers and domestic slaves. The mutual obligations of friends are enumerated as those between equals. The other relationships are treated as those between juniors and seniors. The juniors have prior obligations to the seniors and only when fulfilled can they expect the seniors to do their duties in return. This

seems logical in the cases of children and parents, pupils and teachers and between householders and their moral guides, but surprisingly the Buddha reverses order of seniority when it comes to the husband-wife and employer-employee relationships. The conventional superior's obligations precede those of the conventional inferior. The old valuation is replaced by the Rule of the Noble: the *ariyan gahapati* must do his duty by wife and employees first. Only then may he expect them to fulfil their duties to him loyally and conscientiously.

The *gahapati* should first honour, respect and be faithful to his wife. But the Buddha goes further than what may be expected of a mere good husband. He says that the husband should *serve* his wife in five ways: he should treat her with honour; not disparage her; not be unfaithful to her; share authority with her; and provide her with adornments befitting her position. Since the *gahapti* household was a unit of production, "sharing authority" meant more than letting the wife manage housekeeping. This becomes clear when her duties are mentioned. A wife thus ministered to will properly organise the work; treat the workers well; protect the stores; and be diligent and skilful. In this way she reciprocates her husband's proper treatment. It is difficult to render the emotional nuance of the verb *anumkampati*, translated here as "reciprocate". It is something stronger than wifely love. It indicates the feelings of a woman who understands and shares the interests and concerns of her husband, and therefore literally "pulsates together with him". This is a completely different understanding of a wife's role from that generally defined as one of service and submission to her master. It must be noted that here the wife is not asked to *obey her husband*. In fact the word "obedience" is remarkably absent from the Buddha's moral lexicon. The husband is not asked to command, but to share authority with his wife. When husband and wife fulfil their obligations; properly understood, "the Western quarter is secure, in peace and free from fear".

The duties of a *gahapati* towards his employees, as enunciated by the Buddha, amount to the first social charter on workers' rights. According to the Vinaya of the noble, a *gahapti* employer should:

1. Allocate work according to workers' strengths and abilities;
2. Provide just wages;
3. Provide healthcare;
4. Surprise workers with extras; and,
5. Provide leisure and rest.

The 'unexpected surprises' would in today's terms correspond to wage bonuses given over and above obligations. The spirit of this worker-master relationship can be summed up by the well-known socialist norm: "From each according to his/her abilities and to each according to his/her needs." When the servants and wage labourers are thus ministered to, they work diligently, irrespective of whether the master's eyes are on them or not. They begin their work on time and leave only after their tasks are finished; be satisfied with their wages, knowing that they are just; and will safeguard the good name of their master. In this way "the Base is secure, in peace and free from fear". The Buddha envisaged the possibility of creating work conditions in which employers and employees do not see themselves as locked in an antagonistic relationship, one seeking merely to maximise profits and the other to maximise wages. Production can be transformed into a cooperative venture, but employers must take the first step to make this a reality.

The perennial relevance of the principles laid down in the Sigalovada Sutta can be appreciated if compared with those contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

> *Article 23*
> a. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
> b. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
> c. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection...

> *Article 24*
> Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

The Buddha recognised that creation of wealth is a necessary condition for ensuring social welfare. Wealth has to be created before it can be distributed. In the Sigalovada Sutta, the Buddha urges entrepreneurs to produce wealth non-injuriously, "just as the bee gathers honey". His advice on prudent householding (this is what "economics" originally meant) is starkly realistic. Instead of squandering his wealth in wanton living, a wise *gahapati* divides it into four parts: one-fourth for consumption; two-fourths reinvested; and one-fourth held in reserve.

In his dismissive treatment of the Buddha's Teaching, Max Weber opinionated: "A rational economic ethic could not develop in this sort of religious order" (216). Weber obviously read the wrong sources. The Buddha's numerous discourses to rulers and householders show that he was not an estranged world-renouncer indifferent to the wellbeing and happiness of ordinary people. His entire Teaching is based on insight into the conditioned co-arising of phenomena. Poverty and miserable conditions are not the result of divine caprice, unchangeable fate, nor naturally occurring tragedies. They arise under specific and verifiable conditions, which can be identified and eradicated.

Moral demands for people to live virtuous lives, he realised, are platitudes if minimum conditions for wholesome living are absent. This principle was recognised by Buddha in the provisions he made for his mendicant disciples. He did not require them to live miserably, nor to neglect basic personal hygiene. He ruled that his disciples were entitled four basic conditions of life: food (*pindapata*); clothing (*civara*); housing (*senasana*) and medicine/healthcare (*gilanapaccaya*). The provision of these four indispensable life-conditions for renouncers has wider social significance: the recognition that all human beings, irrespective of gender and social status, have a right not merely to life but also to the indispensable needs for the preservation of that life, namely food, clothing, shelter and healthcare. The Buddha's recognition of these rights in the sixth

century BCE has only now been ratified as fundamental and universal in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

> Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services...

The Buddha's Teaching on political and economic affairs embraces all sentient life and shows sensitivity to the need for protection of the living environment. The vision he unfolds expresses conviction that we humans can live in a reconciled universe, in harmony with what ignorant people disparagingly dismiss as "external nature".

Chapter 9

An Alternative Model for Society: the Buddha Sangha

After some hesitation, the Buddha decided to propagate the Way to Liberation from Suffering he had discovered. He counselled kings and chieftains of federated clans about righteous governance. But he realised that society also needed men and women who would exemplify the values he sought to instil in rulers and ruled alike. So when he decided to propagate his message of deliverance he did not seek state patronage to morally influence society; he chose to do it through an organisation committed to the values of his Dhamma. He strove all his life to mould an a-societal community that would be a fitting exemplar and bearer of his message. He hoped this new society would demonstrate in practice what could be possible in the wider society. This was the significance in the Buddha's founding a community of mendicant preachers:

> Good men found themselves without a place and without any freedom in an increasingly centralised society ruled by money and force... The Buddha and other philosophers of the time looked elsewhere for a solution, not primarily in society but in the first place away from it. In effect they contracted out of society in order to preserve their freedom; they abandoned the quest for wealth and power and sought peace of mind and spiritual experience. Only from an independent vantage point could they hope – as they certainly did hope – to exercise any influence on the society they had left, to infuse into it better values than money and violence (Warder 30-31).

Founding the Buddha Sangha

The Buddha made a strategic choice about the type of organisation to best embody and transmit the values of his Dhamma. Several models were available. One was the *ashram* model adopted by renouncers who embraced the contemplative life of severe asceticism. These *ashrams* were forest retreats, and individuals dissatisfied with life in society could repair to one and undergo training beneath a guru, in order to purify themselves and attain peace of mind. After testing the *ashram* model and its methods, Siddhartha Gotama discarded it as dissatisfactory. He realised these techniques did little to change the conditions which engendered suffering not only at the personal level but also in society.

The most powerful system of political organisation at the time was the monarchical-imperial state. But the Buddha rejected the monarchical model, where power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader and social order is maintained through a top-down chain of command, because the highest virtue in such society is unquestioning obedience. Blind obedience was incompatible with his belief in informed understanding and self-reliance.

Before he renounced household life, Siddhartha Gotama was heir to the joint chieftancy of the Sakyan tribal federation. He had been educated in the customs and organisational principles of clan society and would eventually have played a leading role in the governance of his clan. In these societies, social unity was maintained through kinship. In large tribal federations, social cohesion was preserved through two organisational principles: segmentation and descent. A federation consisted of several segments or kinship clusters, each descended from a common ancestor. The entire federation, moreover, claimed to have descended from a real or mythical ancestor. The heads of the senior lineage from various segments met in formal assembly to decide matters of common concern. This was a form of representative government, though restricted to the property owning lineage. Matters of public concern were settled after free exchange of opinions and by common consent.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Buddha rebuffed the minister of war who came to gather information from him, and was deeply

concerned that the Vajjian federation might fall if they did not remain strong by adherence to seven conditions that would ensure prosperity. After the minister left, the Buddha asked Ananda to summon all mendicant disciples for a special meeting. He then instructed them on seven conditions that would ensure his own Sangha "would prosper and not decline". These seven parallel the practices of the *ganasanghas* praised by the Buddha. The Maha Parinibbana Sutta clearly shows that when it came to his own organisation, the Buddha rejected the monarchical system and modelled it instead on the *ganasangha*. To this day, the community of Buddhist renouncers and followers is known as the Sangha, which the Buddha referred to as his Savaka Sangha. Unfortunately, *sangha* has been erroneously translated into English as "order", evoking association with Christian monastic orders, so the concrete referent of the term in the Buddha's Day has been obscured. Ideologists serving Western colonial interests have attached a pejorative connotation to the word "tribe" so that Westernised Buddhists may feel embarrassed by reminders of the original meaning of *sangha*. But beginning with Lewis H. Morgan's study *Ancient Society* in 1877, anthropologists have discarded the jaundiced view that tribal societies are all without exception backward and barbaric. Morgan discovered that tribal societies embody values since discarded by so-called 'civilised' societies, which are dedicated to the pursuit of private interests. In the long term, he observed, "a mere property career cannot be the final destiny of mankind" (562). A time will come when humankind, if it is to survive, will have to return to the nobler values of these ancient institutions:

> Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges and universal education foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. *It will be a revival, in a higher form of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes* (562 emphasis added).

The Sangha founded by the Buddha may have been envisaged as the exemplar and catalyst of a society that holds and cherishes the values of universal and non-discriminating compassion, equality in rights

and privileges, and the brotherhood and sisterhood of all humans. Experience, intelligence and wisdom indicate these are ethical imperatives that humankind today cannot afford to ignore if it is to survive as a species.

The Buddha Sangha's Constitution

The Buddha's organisation came to be the Buddha Sangha. Membership in this Sangha was not determined by birth, but by free choice of an aspirant and literally by formal adoption into a new type of kinship group. The foundation of a new kind of *sangha* was a brilliant and imaginative project of practical transcendence. All were admitted to full and equal membership in the Buddha Sangha, whether members of the aristocracy, Brahmins or 'ritually unclean' performers of menial tasks like scavengers. This act of "going forth from the household to the homeless life" was, in its historic context, more than the giving up married life; it was the renunciation by men and women of the patriarchal household and its power relations.

The Buddha founded a new type of *sangha* by taking the positive values and practices of clan societies and by transcending in practice their narrow perspective, which confined egalitarianism to blood relations. The Buddha extended egalitarianism and solidarity to include all human beings and founded a Universal Tribe, which he called a "Sangha of the Four Quarters", comprising male and female renouncers and householders. The choice of colour worn by the Buddha's disciples was a frontal rebuff to the Brahmins *varna*, or colour scheme. White was worn by Brahmins to indicate ritual purity and high social status; black was assigned to *sudras*. The Buddhist mendicants donned saffron coloured robes, the colour of rags worn by the untouchable *candalas*. Reversing Brahmin notions of high and low, the Buddhist householders wore white garments when they assembled to hear instructions on the Dhamma from mendicants. Incensed Brahmins regularly attacked Buddhist mendicants as *sudras*, "shameless beggars, shavelings, dark fellows born of Brahma's foot" (Digha Nikaya I.90 on). They faced a formidable

threat, because the Buddhists' leader was an outstanding personality once of a prestigious *ksatriyan* lineage.

When a man or woman entered the Sangha of mendicants, he or she legally became a member of this universal society. But *de facto*, a candidate was initiated into a local commune, also called a *sangha*. The Universal Sangha was a federation of self-governing communes, a *ganasangha* in the best sense of the term, because the existing system's particularism had been transcended not in thought but in practice. Private property was abolished and the clan tradition of collective ownership adopted: property was shared, as among members of an extended kinship group. The amalgam of this new society was filial devotion to the founding father, the Buddha, and *dana*: sharing the values of his Dhamma. In the spirit of *dana* the renouncers brought the gift of Dhamma instruction to the householders, and in exchange the householders provided them with the basic necessities of life. It is therefore not surprising that the first Buddhists referred to themselves as "Sons and Daughters of the Sakyan".

In accord with the tradition of lineage societies, the unity of early Buddhist *sanghas* was not merely legalistic. The members were welded together by bonds of familial affection. In their songs of freedom, the first Buddhist women expressed gratitude for the beautiful friendship, *kalyana mittata*, and the sisterhood they found in the *bhikkhuni sangha*. The Vinaya Pitaka refers to a community of *bhikkhus* led by the Elder Anuruddha where beautiful friendship reigned. When the Buddha inquired about the welfare of this community, Anuruddha replied: "Master, we are all living together on friendly terms and blending harmoniously, as milk and water, regarding each other with the eye of affection." (Vinaya Pitaka I.351)

The Buddha's companion and aide Ananda once asked him if beautiful friendship and companionship in the Sangha constituted a partial realisation of his Noble Path, to which the Buddha replied:

> Not so! Not so, Ananda! Truly, the whole of this life of excellence consists in beautiful friendship, beautiful support and beautiful comradeship (Samyutta Nikaya I.88).

This seldom quoted description of the Noble Way's social efflorescence suggests the Buddha believed that the goal of human liberation has to be realised not in another world, but through the creation of a social humanity and a humane society. Real freedom is possible only in authentic communities where individuals obtain happiness in and through free and non-discriminating association. In a morally transformed society, individuals will see each other not as means or obstacles to their freedom, but as the conditions of their freedom. Freedom from every form of subjection is what his a-societal Sangha was meant to provide and exemplify. In the Buddha's own words:

> In my Sangha, there is only one flavour, the flavour of freedom (Vinaya Pitaka V.335).

In a world divided by personal and group interests, the first Buddha Sangha was intended to demonstrate in practice that there is another possibility. The Buddha expressed this ideal, as originally envisaged, in beautiful and moving language:

> Let us live happily, hating none, in the midst of those who hate
> Let us live healthily, among those live unhealthily
> Let us live free from care among those afflicted with anxiety
> Let us happily then, we who posses nothing
> Like radiant gods (Dhammapada 197-200).

The Buddha Sangha's Democratic Ethos

Religious and moral philosophers can proclaim noble ideals, but they remain empty phrases unless translated into concrete practices. The Vinaya Pitaka provides information on how the ancient values and practices of the *ganasanghas* were translated into rules and regulations for the Buddha Sangha. This Buddhist Book of Discipline is strikingly different from the Rules of Monastic Discipline in Christian Tradition, such as the Rules of St. Benedict, which served as the model for subsequent monastic orders and religious congregations. The Buddha did not draft a constitution and

impose it on those wishing to enter his Sangha. The Vinaya Pitaka is a record of a jurisprudential tradition that developed in the early Buddhist communities, following rules of procedure established by the Buddha himself. Regulations were enacted to resolve issues on a case by case basis.

The Buddhist communes did not have a head corresponding to abbot or abbess, nor father or mother superior of Christian monastic orders. The Dhammapada states that anyone aspiring to be a 'superior' in this manner should be regarded "as a fool" (vs.73). The Christian monastic axiom is that the voice of the superior is the voice of God. The superior has to be obeyed without question. Siddhartha Gotama was the member of a warrior class and he was familiar with military discipline and the art of warfare, but he did not wish to impose militaristic discipline on his Sangha. What he required of all his followers was informed understanding and free acceptance of his Teachings. When a person was admitted into the Sangha, he or she undertook to practice poverty and celibacy, but no oath of obedience was required. The Noble Eightfold Way given to householders and renouncers alike was not a table of prohibitions, but a call to positive living.

The head of a local Buddhist community was the senior *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhuni*; seniority being reckoned not by age, but from the year that a mendicant entered the Sangha. The head of a community could not however unilaterally decide matters of doctrine and discipline; these had to be settled by formal assembly of all community members. The Buddha realised that a majority decision may not always be just and correct. He therefore insisted that decisions taken by an assembly be made in what was called the "Presence", referring to the presence of:

a. The complete assembly;
b. The parties to the dispute; and,
c. The spirit, not merely the letter of the Dhamma and the Vinaya, as it applied to all the members of the Sangha of the Four Directions.

As the Sangha grew and spread geographically, problems arose in local communities over correct interpretation of the Dhamma and the

general rules of discipline. Guidelines were developed for deciding how the rules could be applied to suit particular situations. But in every case, the interpretations and applications had to be in accord with the spirit of the Dhamma and Vinaya, hence the requirement that a decision be made in their Presence. This meant that decisions could be declared *ultra vires* – beyond the authority of the constitution and rules – as indeed they often were. The following principles and procedures are from the Vinaya Pitaka's chapters on the Formal Acts of the Sangha and Dissension in the Sangha. This is not an exhaustive list; the points have been chosen to indicate the democratic ethos of the early Buddha Sangha.

1. Disputes that required a formal resolution were twofold: those regarding matters of doctrine and those regarding discipline.

2. Fortnightly meetings were held for edifying discussions about the Dhamma, and to renew the dedication of renouncers in the pursuit of moral perfection. These meetings were similar to the Chapter of Faults in the (much later) Western monastic system. Individuals publicly confessed disciplinary breaches, asked the forgiveness of the community and promised to reform themselves.

3. In addition to these stipulated meetings, extraordinary meetings could be convoked if disputes arose over doctrinal and disciplinary matters. Rules governing the convocation and conduct of such assemblies were clearly laid down.

4. A matter could be validly settled only if all members of a community participated in deliberations. Everyone who enjoyed full membership of the community, however junior, had the right to participate and vote. Thus at least within the Sangha, the principle of universal suffrage was recognised.

5. Issues requiring a complete assembly and a quorum to constitute such an assembly were laid down.

6. The head of a community did not become *de jure* the president of an assembly called to settle internal disputes and dissension. For such occasions, the assembly elected a learned and virtuous person as its *ad hoc* president. This position ceased after deliberations were concluded. The rules admonish the president not to use the position as a means for personal elevation within the community.

7. Once a decision to convoke an assembly was taken, all legal members of a community had to be given due notice, so they could attend and participate in the deliberations. This precluded the possibility of one faction manipulating a meeting towards their ends. If an individual could not participate due to unavoidable circumstances, a reason was necessary. She or he could, however, delegate another member of the community to speak and vote on her or his behalf.

8. A motion had to be presented thrice. The participants were given time to discuss and debate, with the aim of arriving at a consensual decision. Once the president was satisfied that the matter had been sufficiently discussed and consensus emerged, the decision was presented as a formal resolution. The resolution was also presented thrice, to ensure that everyone fully understood its import. A resolution was considered unanimously adopted if the assembly remained silent each time it was presented.

9. The assembly could also take a secret ballot, if more feasible, in which case a polling officer was appointed. The officer had to be a person of proven moral rectitude, personal integrity and learning in the Dhamma and the Vinaya. The secret ballot could be taken by the "whispering method" – the members whispered their opinions into the polling officer's ear – or by using marked wooden tokens. In general, the community was required to abide by the majority decision, but not always, as the polling officer had the power to declare a decision, even if taken unanimously, *ultra vires* the Dhamma and Vinaya.

10. A decision taken previously could not be changed later with the help of absentees.

11. If a discussion drifted aimlessly and the assembly found it difficult to decide the matter, or if there was danger that the debate would become acrimonious, the president or polling officer could call for an adjournment. The participants were asked to consider their opinions in the spirit of the Dhamma and Vinaya and come back to take an informed and honest decision.

12. If still unable to reach an agreement, the matter would be entrusted to a committee acceptable to the contending parties. An arbitration committee had to consist of at least eight individuals, including a president and secretary, and qualifications were specified. The secretary would announce points referred to the committee one by one. The president would give his opinion and others would then express theirs; a vote would be taken to settle the issue. The committee would reconvene the assembly and the secretary would repeat the points of contention. The president of the commission would announce the decision taken. The community was required to abide by the commission's decision and the proceedings were terminated.

13. If the committee found it difficult to arrive at a decision, the matter was referred back to the full assembly and a decision taken by simple majority. The matter was then declared closed. In exceptional situations, the matter could be referred to a body of jurors belonging to another community.

14. The supreme right of dissent and the right to secede were recognised in the first *sanghas*. These provisions anticipated situations where despite extensive discussion and sincere effort, parties to a dispute could not arrive at a mutually acceptable decision because each party believed in conscience that it was correct. A dissenting party then had the right to secede and form

a new community without forfeiting its communion with the Sangha of the Four Directions. In this, Trevor Ling observes, the Buddhist approach stands in striking contrast to the dogmatism of many religions in which dissenters have been branded heretics and burned at the stake or wars have been waged to preserve 'purity' of faith:

> In the Buddhist case, the inevitability of sectarian differences had been acknowledged, with the result that Buddhism has not experienced the internecine wars of religion that have characterized some other traditions, where dissent or 'heresy' has been something to be stamped out... This should not be taken to mean that the Buddhist Sangha recognised no canons or orthodoxy. The matter is represented as having been explicitly dealt with by the Buddha himself, who set out certain criteria by which authentic Buddhist doctrine could be recognised (131-32).

Jurisprudence in the Buddha Sangha

The Vinaya Pitaka provides clear guidelines on how to deal with violations of discipline by renouncers:

1. Offences were classified according to gravity and appropriate punishments clearly stated.

2. Passage of retroactive legislation was prohibited.

3. The most grievous violations mandated expulsion from the Sangha. For other grave violations, the punishment was temporary ostracisation and a probationary period. A mentor assigned to the delinquent assisted rehabilitation. For minor offences, it was sufficient that an offender publicly acknowledged the mistake and promised to make amends.

4. No physical punishments were imposed for violators, however grievous. The aim of penalties was never retributive in character;

they were intended to reform and rehabilitate. The infliction of physical punishment as atonement for sin is alien to Buddhist tradition.

5. The right to be judged by ones peers was recognised. The accused could plead not guilty and offer a defence before the full assembly, with assistance from an advocate, if necessary.

6. Anonymous accusations were not entertained. The accused had the right to face his or her accuser in the assembly.

7. This was perhaps the earliest legal system where the law of evidence was considered the only basis for deciding a person's guilt or innocence. Throughout most of human history, the accused had to undergo horrible trials by ordeal. The Buddha insisted that his Teaching and Ethical Path was an experience-based discovery that could be tested and validated through practice. Buddhist judicial norms reflected this emphasis on the empirical.

8. An accused was deemed innocent until proven guilty. Evidence against an accused had to be presented, and if necessary witnesses called for. If the accuser was found to have made a false charge then he or she was deemed to have committed a crime equal in gravity to that which he or she had accused the innocent individual of. The accused had the right to call witnesses to refute the charges. Either party could be charged with perjury if evidence brought forward was false.

9. The principle of *compos mentis* was recognised when judging an offender's culpability; the accused or advocate could plead that he or she was not in a right state of mind when the offence was committed. If confirmed, the charges, however grievous, had to be dropped. If the person recovered sanity, the charge could not be revived, because it had been established that at the time of commission he or she was not of right mind.

10. The accused could not resort to plea-bargaining; admitting a lesser offence to avoid being convicted for a more serious one, for example: "I did not sexually harass the woman, but I did try to be with her in a lonely place." The accused had to be found guilty or innocent as charged. Thereafter a separate hearing had to be held for any lesser offence to which the accused pleaded guilty.

11. Double jeopardy was formally excluded. Once a person was exonerated of a violation, he or she could not be charged for the same offence in the future; the case was closed. The same principle applied to doctrinal disputes. The canonical phrase for regarding a matter as closed is "covering up, as with grass". Bringing up a matter thus closed was an offence. It was likewise an offence to criticise a decision taken or a verdict passed after due process.

Sukumar Dutt's glowing tribute to the democratic ethos of the first Buddha *sanghas* is a fitting end to this chapter:

> The supreme liberty of man was guarded in an ancient Buddhist Sangha with a jealousy so strict that it would seem in the eyes of non-Buddhists like an open door for all sorts of heretical doxies. But this feature of ancient Buddhist monastic life was of a piece with the whole trend of ancient Indian culture. Freedom of thought is said to be a Greek 'invention'. Yet before the advent of Socrates on the agora of Athens, it had been a reiterated theme in the Buddha's dialogues and discourses. He left his teaching to his monk-followers and they incorporated it in their monastic system and jealously guarded it in their Sangha life as it its most precious and inalienable heritage (163).

Chapter 10

Early Buddhism and Later Centuries

The picture of early Buddhism sketched here may seem idyllic, and the question could be asked: what practical impact did it actually have on society at large? The Vinaya Pitaka, in particular, creates an impression that the first converts and most enthusiastic supporters were the social elite. Kings and members of aristocratic families, wealthy traders and merchant-bankers are reported to have been the main devotees of the male order. As discussed, within two hundred years of the Buddha's death, Buddhism had become a status religion. The Sangha became recipient of entire villages and was entitled to a major share of the produce from the land and services of inhabitants. Monastic landlordism structurally integrated the Sangha into the dominant system of production. A diachronic study of the rules and regulations that were drawn up to meet changing conditions indicates gradual accommodation of dominant values.

But this is the history of Buddhism as reported. If we delve beneath the surface, we can ferret-out information on other dynamics at work in early Buddhist communities. The texts highlighted in this study provide glimpses into a radical elan that seems to have been stifled by subsequent developments. The Jatakas reflected the popular face of early Buddhism: folk tales were skilfully adapted and used to educate ordinary people about basic Buddhist values; many bristle with radical social criticism.

Beyond that, the scriptures provide few details about what was taking place at the societal base. We know little about the lives of ordinary men and women in the period that elapsed between the death of the Buddha (486 BCE) and the conversion of Emperor Asoka to Buddhism (± 260 BCE). Asoka's conversion is generally portrayed as a dramatic change of heart by an ambitious and ruthless king. His conversion to the Dhamma is explained as the outcome of

personal remorse after a bloody campaign that cost tens of thousands of lives. This is only a partial explanation of the factors that may have led to his conversion. Asoka was no religious dotard; he was an effective and astute ruler who kept a tight rein on his empire. His conversion may have been precipitated by personal as well as sociological reasons. The bloody campaign that he himself admitted cost so many lives must have shocked the moral sensibilities of his subjects.

This is more than pious conjecture. Asoka had been schooled in the amoral principles of Brahmin statecraft already referred to. The Arthasastra treatise advised princes not to let moral considerations stand in the way of their determination to capture, consolidate and further aggrandise power. Ideologists in service of the ruling classes argued that this state of affairs was necessary for social order and welfare. Until the wandering teachers of Northeast India appeared, religion was concerned largely with regulation of marriage, dietary habits and hygiene imposed by taboos and notions of ritual purity and impurity.

The wandering teachers of the sixth century BCE propagated moral principles that transcended local customs and cults, questioning the relevance of gods and preaching values that were valid for all peoples, irrespective of regional and ethnic difference. They rose in protest against rampant violence and power-hungry kings. The first Buddhists declared that *ahimsa*, non-injuriousness, and *dana*, sharing, were nobler values than violence and greed.

Throughout the Magadhan Empire, mendicant teachers sensitised people to new values and taught them that military might, violence and cruelty are not necessary accoutrements of state power. This universal ethic captured the imagination of the masses, creating a moral force that broke down local isolation and united them in the solidarity of a shared Teaching. The Buddhist teachers educated them to judge the greatness of others by their moral conduct, not by birth, wealth or power. People may have had no option but to submit to a tyrant's might, however they no longer perceived this as the will of a god or as an inevitable fate. A simple peasant living a good life was persuaded that he was morally superior to those who oppressed him because they claimed a right to do so being 'noble' by birth.

Conditions were ripe for change of the amoral policies of Kautilyan statecraft. Kings could no longer rule with their people's active consent if the moral standards of their subjects were nobler than their own. As Kosambi explains:

> The Asokan reform removed a fundamental contradiction in the Arthasastra statecraft, namely a moral law-abiding population ruled by a completely amoral king who was enjoined to practise every crime against subjects and neighbours as a matter of policy (1975: 237).

> The fundamental change was not religious, so much as the attitude shown for the first time by an Indian monarch towards his subjects: 'Whatever exertion I shall make, I strive only to discharge the debt that I owe to all living creatures.' This was a startlingly new and inspiring ideal of kingship, completely strange to earlier Magadhan statecraft, where the king symbolised the state's absolute power. The Arthasastra king owed nothing to anyone; his sole business was to rule for the profit of the state, with efficiency as the one ultimate criterion. With Asoka, the social philosophy expressed in the sixth century religions had at last penetrated the state mechanism.
>
> [Asoka] ceated a new class of plenipotentiary supervisors with control over officials and funds. Their title was Dhamma-mahamatra, which can be translated 'minister for morality'. The correct formulation at the Asokan stage is High Commissioner of Equity. Equity is the principle beyond formal codified law and common law upon which both law and justice are supposedly based. This corresponds exactly to the early meaning of Dhamma and justifies Menander's Greel translation *dikaios* for *dhammaka*. Part of the new high commissioner's duties was to examine the complaints of all law-abiding groups and sects, to see that they were treated fairly; but also to ascertain the tenets and principles of all such groups and sects...
>
> The Asokan edicts clearly provide the first constitutional checks against the crown, the first Bill of Rights for the citizen. This is made clear by the special instruction to officials that the edicts be read out and fully explained to large public gatherings at least three times a year. The special tool for conciliatory action (in society) was precisely the universal Dhamma in a new sense. King and citizen found common meeting-ground in freshly developed religion... It can even be

> said that the Indian national character received the stamp of Dhamma from the time of Asoka... It is altogether fitting that the present Indian national symbol is derived from what remains of the Asokan lion-capital at Sarnath (1977: 163-165).

Buddhism has almost completely disappeared in the land of its birth. As a result, Buddhists tend to forget that Siddhartha Gotama was, as Jawarhalal Nehru put it, "India's greatest son". The choice of a Buddhist symbol for a state whose citizens are overwhelmingly 'Hindu' is in itself a revalidation of the ideals propounded by a great Indian, whom the first Buddhists hailed as the "Torchbearer of Humankind". The white band on the Indian flag symbolises *ahimsa*, and the Wheel placed at its centre, signifying Righteous Governance and Production is, historically speaking, also a Buddhist symbol. Independent India chose to be a 'secular' state dedicated to safeguarding national unity while respecting the cultural and linguistic diversity of its manifold people, its *bahujana*. This too is a return to the Asokan ideal of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity.

Among all the rulers of pre-modern times, Asoka shines like a brilliant star in a dark firmament of despotic kings, pharaohs and caesars. Asoka tried not only to infuse moral values into politics, but endeavoured to make sure his subjects were informed about the principles by which he resolved to rule his vast kingdom. These principles were engraved on rock pillars and placed throughout the empire. His provincial governors and judicial officers were ordered to assemble the people at regular intervals and educate them about their rights. The discovery of Asoka's rock edicts is tangible proof that the Buddha's teachings on statecraft did not remain a utopian ideal. An attempt had been made to implement them by perhaps the most enlightened ruler in history.

It can be said with justification that, beginning with the Buddha – through Asoka and Akbar the Great, to Jawarharlal Nehru and Ambedkar – there has been an unbroken stream of consciousness in India demonstrating profound respect for the ever-changing, physiological and cultural pluriformity through which the singular human species manifests itself. The respect for pluriforimity inculcated by the Buddha did not imply, as the discourses discussed

in this study amply demonstrate, condoning cultural traditions that violate civilised norms of equity and non-injuriousness towards living beings. The first Buddhists revolted against Brahminism because it was and is fundamentally inhumane. The ethical values advocated by the Buddha can be considered 'secular': they are based not on a divine transcendental law, nor *a-priori* ethical categories, but on empirically verifiable truths. As the Buddha himself stated, his Way is neither esoteric nor mystical:

> It is a Way in the following of which one will by oneself know, and by oneself see that the Teacher Gotama speaks opportunely, speaks of that which is beneficial, speaks of that which is in accordance with actuality, speaks of leading out (Digha Nikaya 165).

Appendix

Asoka's Edicts: The First Bill of Human and Animal Rights

Rock pillars inscribed with Asoka's edicts have been discovered in a vast area covering modern India, Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan. The inscriptions are in local languages: at the extreme west of the empire, near modern Kandahar, the inscriptions are in Greek and Aramaic; elsewhere they are in the Brahmi script. The following selection of edicts consists of those relevant to this study. Sources consulted were Ven S. Dhammika's and Romila Tharpar's translations, and Kosambi (1977).

Asoka's edicts are historical evidence of the first state to legally recognise religious and cultural pluralism. By "the essentials of all religions" (Edict 12) Asoka probably meant not the doctrines or beliefs of religions, but ethical principles which are consistent with the five precepts. This put an end to the indiscriminate burning of forests to clear land for cultivation. The Brahmins regarded such practice as a spectacular offering to the fire god Agni, to ritually purify the land. Asoka banned fire sacrifices by decree, together with forms of the saturnalia *samaja*, which led to heavy drinking, public orgies, deplorable excesses and crime (Kosambi 1977:162)

To some notes on terms in the text. Asoka, meaning "sorrow-less", adopted the title "Devanampiya Piyadasi", which means "Beloved of the Gods, He Who Looks With Affection". The word translated here as "ceremonies" is *mangala*: these were rites performed at times and in places regarded as auspicious. The Buddha condemned these practices as vulgar and worthless: see the Mangala Sutta (Sutta Nipata) and the Brahmajala Sutta (Digha Nikaya). The "sound of the drum" (Edict 4) most probably referred to the beating of a drum as criminals were led to execution. The Ajivikas were a school of peripatetic teachers founded by Makkhali Gosala. The

Niganthas were of the Jain school, founded by the Mahavira. Both leaders were contemporaries of the Buddha.

The Fourteen Rock Edicts

1. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, has caused this Dhamma edict to be written. Here (in my domain) no living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice. Nor should festivals be held, for Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, sees much to object to in such festivals, although there are some festivals that Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does approve of. Formerly, in the kitchen of Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, hundreds of thousands of animals were killed every day to make curry. But now with the writing of this Dhamma edict only three creatures, two peacocks and a deer are killed, and the deer not always. And in time, not even these three creatures will be killed.

2. Everywhere within Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi's domain, and among the people beyond the borders, everywhere has King Piyadasi made provision for two types of medical treatment: medical treatment for humans and medical treatment for animals. Wherever medical herbs suitable for humans or animals are not available, I have had them imported and grown. Wherever medical roots or fruits are not available I have had them imported and grown. Along roads I have had wells dug and trees planted for the benefit of humans and animals.

3. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: Twelve years after my coronation this has been ordered – Everywhere in my domain the *yuktas* (subordinate officers), the *rajukas* (rural administrators) and the *pradesikas* (heads of the districts) shall go on inspection tours every five years for the purpose of Dhamma instruction and also to conduct other business. The Council shall notify the *yuktas* about the observance of these instructions in these very words.

4. In the past, for many hundreds of years, killing or harming living beings and improper behaviour towards relatives, and improper behaviour towards Brahmans and ascetics has increased. But now due to Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi's Dhamma practice, the sound of the drum has been replaced by the sound of the Dhamma... Truly, this is the highest work, to instruct in Dhamma. But practicing the Dhamma cannot be done by one who is devoid of virtue and therefore its promotion and growth is commendable.

5. In the past there were no Dhamma Mahamatras (High Commissioners of Dhamma) but such officers were appointed by me thirteen years after my coronation. Now they work among all religions for the establishment of Dhamma, for the promotion of Dhamma, and for the welfare and happiness of all who are devoted to Dhamma. They work among soldiers, chiefs, Brahmans, householders, the poor, the aged and those devoted to Dhamma – for their welfare and happiness – so that they may be free from harassment. They (High Commissioners of Dhamma) work for the proper treatment of prisoners and for the release of those who have a family to support, the sick and the aged. They work here, in outlying towns, in the women's quarters belonging to my brothers and sisters, and among my other relatives. They are occupied everywhere. These Dhamma Mahamatras are occupied in my domain among people devoted to Dhamma to determine who is devoted to Dhamma, who is established in Dhamma, and who is generous. This Dhamma edict has been written on stone so that it might endure long and that my descendants might act in conformity with it.

6. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: In the past, state business was not transacted nor were reports delivered to the king at all hours. But now I have given this order, that at any time, whether I am eating, in the women's quarters, the bed chamber, the chariot, the palanquin, in the park or wherever, reporters are to be posted with instructions to report to me the affairs of the people so that I might attend to these affairs

wherever I am. And whatever I orally order in connection with donations or proclamations, or when urgent business presses itself on the Mahamatras, if disagreement or debate arises in the Council, then it must be reported to me immediately. This is what I have ordered. I am never content with exerting myself or with despatching business. Truly, I consider the welfare of all to be my duty, and the root of this is exertion and the prompt despatch of business. There is no better work than promoting the welfare of all the people and whatever efforts I am making is to repay the debt I owe to all beings to assure their happiness in this life, and attain heaven in the next.

7. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desires that all religions should reside everywhere, for all of them desire self-control and purity of heart. But people have various desires and various passions, and they may practice all of what they should or only a part of it. But one who receives great gifts yet is lacking in self-control, purity of heart, gratitude and firm devotion, such a person is mean.

8. In the past kings used to go out on pleasure tours during which there was hunting and other entertainment. But ten years after Beloved-of-the-Gods had been crowned, he went on a tour to Sambodhi and thus instituted Dhamma tours. During these tours, the following things took place: visits and gifts to Brahmans and ascetics, visits and gifts of gold to the aged, visits to people in the countryside, instructing them in Dhamma, and discussing Dhamma with them as is suitable. It is this that delights Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, and is, as it were, another type of revenue.

9. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: In times of sickness, for the marriage of sons and daughters, at the birth of children, before embarking on a journey, on these and other occasions, people perform various ceremonies. Women in particular perform many vulgar and worthless ceremonies. These types of ceremonies can be performed by all means, but they

bear little fruit. What does bear great fruit, however, is the ceremony of the Dhamma. This involves proper behaviour towards servants and employees, respect for teachers, restraint towards living beings, and generosity towards renouncers and Brahmans. These and other things constitute the ceremony of the Dhamma. Therefore a father, a son, a brother, a master, a friend, a companion, and even a neighbour should say: "This is good, this is the ceremony that should be performed until its purpose is fulfilled, this I shall do." Other ceremonies are of doubtful fruit, for they may achieve their purpose, or they may not, and even if they do, it is only in this world. But the ceremony of the Dhamma is timeless. Even if it does not achieve its purpose in this world, it produces great merit in the next, whereas if it does achieve its purpose in this world, one gets great merit both here and there through the ceremony of the Dhamma.

10. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does not consider glory and fame to be of great account unless they are achieved through having my subjects respect Dhamma and practice Dhamma, both now and in the future. For this alone does Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desire glory and fame. And whatever efforts Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, is making, all of that is only for the welfare of the people in the next world, and that they will have little evil. And being without merit is evil. This is difficult for either a humble person or a great person to do except with great effort, and by giving up other interests. In fact, it may be even more difficult for a great person to do.

11. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: There is no gift comparable to the gift of the Dhamma, the honouring of the Dhamma, the sharing of the Dhamma, fellowship in the Dhamma. And it consists of this: proper behaviour towards servants and employees, respect for mother and father, generosity to friends, companions, relations, Brahmans and ascetics, and not killing living beings. Therefore a father, a son, a brother, a master, a friend, a companion or a neighbour should say: "This is good, this should be done." One benefits in this

world and gains great merit in the next by giving the gift of the Dhamma.

12. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, honours both renouncers and the householders of all religions, and he honours them with gifts and honours of various kinds. But Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does not value gifts and honours as much as he values this – that there should be growth in the essentials of all religions. Growth in essentials can be done in different ways, but all of them have as their root restraint in speech, that is, not praising one's own religion, or condemning the religion of others without good cause. And if there is cause for criticism, it should be done in a mild way. But it is better to honour other religions for this reason. By so doing, one's own religion benefits, and so do other religions, while doing otherwise harms one's own religion and the religions of others. Whoever praises his own religion, due to excessive devotion, and condemns others with the thought "Let me glorify my own religion," only harms his own religion. Therefore contact (between religions) is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desires that all should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions. Those who are content with their own religion should be told this: Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does not value gifts and honours as much as he values that there should be growth in the essentials of all religions. And to this end many are working – Dhamma Mahamatras, Mahamatras in charge of the women's quarters, officers in charge of outlying areas, and other such officers. And the fruit of this is that one's own religion grows and the Dhamma is illuminated also.

13. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, conquered the Kalingas eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died (from other causes). After the Kalingas had been conquered, Beloved-of-the-Gods came to feel a strong inclination towards the Dhamma, a love for the Dhamma and for

instruction in Dhamma. Now Beloved-of-the-Gods feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas. Indeed, Beloved-of-the-Gods is deeply pained by the killing, dying and deportation that take place when an unconquered country is conquered. But Beloved-of-the-Gods is pained even more by this – that Brahmans, ascetics, and householders of different religions who live in those countries, and who are respectful to superiors, to mother and father, to elders, and who behave properly and have strong loyalty towards friends, acquaintances, companions, relatives, servants and employees – that they are injured, killed or separated from their loved ones. Even those who are not affected (by all this) suffer when they see friends, acquaintances, companions and relatives affected. These misfortunes befall all (as a result of war), and this pains Beloved-of-the-Gods… The killing, death or deportation of a hundredth, or even a thousandth part of those who died dung the conquest of Kalinga now pains Beloved-of-the-Gods. Now Beloved-of-the-Gods thinks that even those who do wrong should be forgiven where forgiveness is possible. Even the forest people, who live in Beloved-of-the-Gods' domain, are entreated and reasoned with to act properly. They are told that despite his remorse Beloved-of-the-Gods has the power to punish them if necessary, so that they should be ashamed of their wrong and not be killed. Truly, Beloved-of-the-Gods desires non-injury, restraint and impartiality to all beings, even where wrong has been done. Now it is conquest by Dhamma that Beloved-of-the-Gods considers to be the best conquest. And it (conquest by Dhamma) has been won here, on the borders, even six hundred *yojanas* away, where the Greek king Antiochos rules, beyond there where the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magas and Alexander rule, likewise in the south among the Cholas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni. Here in the king's domain among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in Dhamma. Even where Beloved-of-the-Gods' envoys have not been, these people too, having heard of the practice of Dhamma and the ordinances and

instructions in Dhamma given by Beloved-of-the-Gods, are following it and will continue to do so. This conquest has been won everywhere, and it gives great joy – the joy which only conquest by Dhamma can give.

14. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, has had these Dhamma edicts written in brief, in medium length, and in extended form. Not all of them occur everywhere, for my domain is vast, but much has been written, and I will have still more written. And also there are some subjects here that have been spoken of again and again because of their sweetness, and so that the people may act in accordance with them. If some things written are incomplete, this is because of the locality, or in consideration of the object, or due to the fault of the scribe.

The Kalinga Rock Edicts

1. Beloved-of-the-Gods says that the Mahamatras of Tosali who are judicial officers in the city are to be told this: I wish to see that everything I consider to be proper is carried out in the right way. And I consider instructing you to be the best way of accomplishing this. I have placed you over many thousands of people that you may win the people's affection. All men are my children. What I desire for my own children, and I desire their welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, that I desire for all men. You do not understand to what extent I desire this, and if some of you do understand, you do not understand the full extent of my desire.

   You must attend to this matter. While being completely law-abiding, some people are imprisoned, treated harshly and even killed without cause so that many people suffer. Therefore your aim should be to act with impartiality. It is because of these things – envy, anger, cruelty, hate, indifference, laziness or tiredness – that such a thing does not happen. Therefore your aim should be: "May these things not be in me." And the root of this is non-anger and patience. Those who are bored with the

administration of justice will not be promoted; (those who are not) will move upwards and be promoted. Whoever among you understands this should say to his colleagues: "See that you do your duty properly. Such and such are Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions." Great fruit will result from doing your duty, while failing in it will result in gaining neither heaven nor the king's pleasure. Failure in duty on your part will not please me. But done properly, it will win you heaven and you will be discharging your debts to me.

This edict is to be proclaimed on the eighth day of Tisa and at intervals between Tisa days it is to be read aloud, even if only a single person is present. This inscription has been engraved here in order that the city magistrates should at all times see to it that people might not suffer unjust imprisonment or torture. To achieve this, I will send out Mahamatras every five years who are not harsh or cruel, but who are merciful and who can ascertain if the judicial officers have understood my purpose and are acting according to my instructions.

2. Beloved-of-the-Gods speaks thus: This royal order is to be addressed to the Mahamatras at Samapa. I wish to see that everything I consider to be proper is carried out in the right way. And I consider instructing you to be the best way of accomplishing this. All men are my children. What I desire for my own children, and I desire their welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, that I desire for all men. The people of the unconquered territories beyond the borders might think: "What is the king's intentions towards us?" My only intention is that they live without fear of me, that they may trust me and that I may give them happiness, not sorrow. Furthermore, they should understand that the king will forgive those who can be forgiven, and that he wishes to encourage them to practice Dhamma so that they may attain happiness in this world and the next. I am telling you this so that I may discharge the debts I owe, and that in instructing you, that you may know that my vow and my promise will not be broken. Therefore acting in this way, you should perform your duties and assure them (the people beyond

the borders) that: "The king is like a father. He feels towards us as he feels towards himself. We are to him like his own children."

By instructing you and informing you of my vow and my promise I shall be applying myself in complete fullness to achieving this object. You are able indeed to inspire them with confidence and to secure their welfare and happiness in this world and the next, and by acting thus, you will attain heaven as well as discharge the debts you owe to me. And so that the Mahamatras can devote themselves at all times to inspiring the border areas with confidence and encouraging them to practice Dhamma, this edict has been written here.

This edict is to be listened to every four months on Tisa day, between Tisa days; it may optionally be proclaimed from time to time in the interval between the Tisa days and on occasion may be proclaimed even to a single person. Acting thus, you will conform to my instructions.

Minor Rock Edicts

Piyadasi, King of Magadha, saluting the Sangha and wishing them good health and happiness, speaks thus: You know, reverend sirs, how great my faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and Sangha is. Whatever, reverend sirs, has been spoken by Lord Buddha, all that is well-spoken. I consider it proper, reverend sirs, to advise on how the good Dhamma should last long. These Dhamma texts – Extracts from the Discipline, the Noble Way of Life, the Fears to Come, the Poem on the Silent Sage, the Discourse on the Pure Life, Upatisa's Questions, and the Advice to Rahula which was spoken by the Buddha concerning false speech – these Dhamma texts, reverend sirs, I desire that all the monks and nuns may constantly listen to and remember. Likewise the laymen and laywomen. I have had this written that you may know my intentions.

The Seven Pillar Edicts

1. Beloved-of-the-Gods speaks thus: This Dhamma edict was written twenty-six years after my coronation. Happiness in this world and the next is difficult to obtain without much love for the Dhamma, much self-examination, much respect, much fear (of evil), and much enthusiasm.

   But through my instruction this regard for Dhamma and love of Dhamma has grown day by day, and will continue to grow. And my officers of high, low and middle rank are practicing and conforming to Dhamma, and are capable of inspiring others to do the same. Mahamatras in border areas are doing the same. And these are my instructions: to protect with Dhamma, to make happiness through Dhamma and to guard with Dhamma.

2. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: Dhamma is good, but what constitutes Dhamma? (It includes) little evil, much good, kindness, generosity, truthfulness and purity. I have given the gift of sight in various ways. To two-footed and four-footed beings, to birds and aquatic animals, I have given various things including the gift of life. And many other good deeds have been done by me. This Dhamma edict has been written that people might follow it and it might endure for a long time. And the one who follows it properly will do something good.

3. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: People see only their good deeds saying, "I have done this good deed". But they do not see their evil deeds saying, "I have done this evil deed" or, "This is called evil". But this (tendency) is difficult to see. One should think like this: "It is these things that lead to evil, to violence, to cruelty, anger, pride and jealousy. Let me not ruin myself with these things." And further, one should think: "This leads to happiness in this world and the next."

4. Beloved-of-the-Gods speaks thus: This Dhamma edict was written twenty-six years after my coronation. My *rajukas* are working among the people, among many hundreds of thousands

of people. The hearing of petitions and the administration of justice has been left to them so that they can do their duties confidently and fearlessly and so that they can work for the welfare, happiness and benefit of the people in the country. But they should remember what causes happiness and sorrow, and being themselves devoted to Dhamma, they should encourage the people in the country (to do the same), that they may attain happiness in this world and the next. These *rajukas* are eager to serve me. They also obey other officers who know my desires, who instruct the *rajukas* so that they can please me. Just as a person feels confident having entrusted his child to an expert nurse thinking: "The nurse will keep my child well," even so, the *rajukas* have been appointed by me for the welfare and happiness of the people in the country.

The hearing of petitions and the administration of justice have been left to the *rajukas* so that they can do their duties unperturbed, fearlessly and confidently. It is my desire that there should be uniformity in law and uniformity in sentencing. I even go this far, to grant a three-day stay for those in prison who have been tried and sentenced to death. During this time their relatives can make appeals to have the prisoners' lives spared. If there is none to appeal on their behalf, the prisoners can give gifts in order to make merit for the next world, or observe fasts. Indeed, it is my wish that in this way, even if a prisoner's time is limited, he can prepare for the next world, and that people's Dhamma practice, self-control and generosity may grow.

5. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: Twenty-six years after my coronation various animals were declared to be protected – parrots, mainas, *aruna*, ruddy geese, wild ducks, *nandimukhas*, *gelatas*, bats, queen ants, terrapins, boneless fish, *vedareyaka*, *gangapuputaka*, *sankiya*, fish, tortoises, porcupines, squirrels, deer, bulls, *okapinda*, wild asses, wild pigeons, domestic pigeons and all four-footed creatures that are neither useful nor edible. Those nanny goats, ewes and sows which are with young or giving milk to their young are protected, and so are young ones less than six months old. Cocks are not to be

caponised, husks hiding living beings are not to be burnt and forests are not to be burnt either without reason or to kill creatures. One animal is not to be fed to another. On the three Caturmasis, the three days of Tisa and during the fourteenth and fifteenth of the Uposatha, fish are protected and not to be sold. During these days animals are not to be killed in the elephant reserves or the fish reserves either. On the eighth of every fortnight, on the fourteenth and fifteenth, on Tisa, Punarvasu, the three Caturmasis and other auspicious days, bulls are not to be castrated, billy goats, rams, boars and other animals that are usually castrated are not to be. On Tisa, Punarvasu, Caturmasis and the fortnight of Caturmasis, horses and bullocks are not be branded. In the twenty-six years since my coronation prisoners have been given amnesty on twenty-five occasions.

6. Beloved-of-the-Gods speaks thus: Twelve years after my coronation I started to have Dhamma edicts written for the welfare and happiness of the people, and so that not transgressing them they might grow in the Dhamma. Thinking: "How can the welfare and happiness of the people be secured?" give attention to my relatives, to those dwelling near and those dwelling far, so I can lead them to happiness and then I act accordingly. I do the same for all groups. I have honoured all religions with various honours. But I consider it best to meet with people personally.

7. Beloved-of-the-Gods speaks thus: In the past kings desired that the people might grow through the promotion of the Dhamma. But despite this, people did not grow through the promotion of the Dhamma. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, said concerning this: "It occurs to me that in the past kings desired that the people might grow through the promotion of the Dhamma. But despite this, people did not grow through the promotion of the Dhamma. Now how can the people be encouraged to follow it? How can the people be encouraged to grow through the promotion of the Dhamma? How can I elevate them by promoting the Dhamma?" Beloved-of-the-Gods, King

Piyadasi, further said concerning this: "It occurs to me that I shall have proclamations on Dhamma announced and instruction on Dhamma given. When people hear these, they will follow them, elevate themselves and grow considerably through the promotion of the Dhamma." It is for this purpose that proclamations on Dhamma have been announced and various instructions on Dhamma have been given and that officers who work among many promote and explain them in detail. The *rajukas* who work among hundreds of thousands of people have likewise been ordered: "In this way and that encourage those who are devoted to Dhamma." Beloved-of-the-Gods speaks thus: "Having this object in view, I have set up Dhamma pillars, appointed Dhamma Mahamatras, and announced Dhamma proclamations."

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, says: Along roads I have had banyan trees planted so that they can give shade to animals and men, and I have had mango groves planted. At intervals of eight *krosas*, I have had wells dug, rest-houses built, and in various places, I have had watering-places made for the use of animals and men. But these are but minor achievements. Such things to make the people happy have been done by former kings. I have done these things for this purpose, that the people might practice the Dhamma. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: My High Commissioners of Dhamma too are occupied with various good works among the ascetics and householders of all religions. I have ordered that they should be occupied with the affairs of the Sangha. I have also ordered that they should be occupied with the affairs of the Brahmans and the Ajivikas. I have ordered that they be occupied with the Niganthas. In fact, I have ordered that different High Commissioners of be occupied with the particular affairs of all different religions. And my High Commissioners of Dhamma likewise are occupied with these and other religions.

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, speaks thus: This progress among the people through Dhamma has been done by two means by Dhamma regulations and by persuasion. Of these, Dhamma regulation is of little effect, while persuasion has much

more effect. The Dhamma regulations I have given are that various animals must be protected. And I have given many other Dhamma regulations also. But it is by persuasion that progress among the people through Dhamma has had a greater effect in respect of harmlessness to living beings and non-killing of living beings. Concerning this, Beloved-of-the-Gods says: Wherever there are stone pillars or stone slabs, there this Dhamma edict is to be engraved so that it may long endure.

Glossary of Key Terms

anatta — **"no-self"**
The basic empirical point of departure for the Buddha's unique Ethical Path. An extensive term used by the Buddha to assert the non-existence of a transcendental self and of invisible, non-permanent substances ('things in themselves') behind the changing appearance of beings and things. It does not mean that the Buddha denied the existence of the empirical self or the world of sensuous experience. Taken in conjunction with the assertion of impermanence, *anicca*, this concept rejects the assumption that behind the appearance of things there is an eternal, unchanging essence.

anicca — **"non-permanence"**
The Buddha revealed that not only is the world perceived by the physical senses an illusory reality subject to constant change, decay and dissolution, but also that there is no eternal, unchanging essence beneath it. There is no 'thing as such' within the process, which is permanent or undergoing change. Impermanence, flux, is the only reality.

ariya — **"noble"**
In Brahmin usage, noble by birth and ritually clean. In the Buddha's revaluation, a person of unimpeachable moral conduct, irrespective of birth or ritual status

bahujana **"manifold people"**
This term was used by the Buddha as a designation for the pluriform (physiological and cultural) manifestation of the human species. The Buddha directed his followers to propagate his teaching for the welfare and happiness of all peoples without discrimination as to gender, ethnicity or class, out of compassion for the world of sentient beings.

bhikkhu-ni **"mendicant"; "sharer" (literal)**
The male and female members respectively of the Buddha's new community, who renounced the household life and travelled around propagating and exemplifying the Buddha's ethical ideals. The two terms are ineptly translated as "monk" and "nun" because they fail to distinguish between the first community and later development of monastic orders owning land and property in common.

dana **"gift"**
The earliest mention of this practice is in the hymns of the Rig Veda and in references to an institution for equitable redistribution of wealth in tribal societies. The Buddha seems to have restored honour to this ancient practice. In Brahmin and Buddhist usage, the connotation of redistributive justice associated with the term has been replaced by "charity": almsgiving and philanthropic acts performed with the self-centred intent to gain invisible merit and thereby realise a propitious future rebirth.

gahapati **"lord of the house"**
Head of a large patriarchal household. In the Buddha's Day the patriarchal household was the principal property-owning productive unit of society.

jati **"birth"; "species"; a social group linked by consanguinity**
The Brahmins used colours to hierarchically stratify endogamous occupational groups (see *varna*).

sangha/ gana **"union"**
Ineptly translated as "order" of monks. Its historical reference is to "tribe", a common form of social organisation in the Buddha's Day; he himself was born into one. The various schools of wandering teachers described themselves as a-societal tribes. The Buddha founded his community, which came to be known as the Buddha Sangha, on the model of federated tribes, or *ganasangha*. These federations did not have a monarchical or despotic ruler; they maintained social cohesion through kinship ties and rules of commensality. In the Buddha's revaluation, social cohesion was maintained through kinship in his Dhamma. The Buddha Sangha was envisaged as a Universal Tribe.

varna **"colour"; Doctrine of Colours**

In the Brahmin classification, the Brahmins were white; *ksatriyas*, red; *vaisyas*, blue; and the *sudras*, black. The first three ranks were deemed *ariya*. *Varna* was erroneously understood by Western Indologists as a reference to skin pigmentation, whereas the symbolism was derived from textile colours. Though *varna* is loosely translated as "caste" the proper term for caste is *jati*.

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About the Author

Nalin Swaris was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and was baptised into the Roman Catholic faith. He received his early education at St. Benedict's College in Colombo. After finishing high school, he studied philosophy and theology at St. Alphonsus College in Bangalore, India. He was ordained a Redemptorist Priest in 1962. He resigned from the ministry in 1969 and went to the Netherlands, where he obtained a Master's Degree in Social Sciences in 1973. He taught Social Philosophy and Methodology of Community Development for seventeen years at the Senior College for Social Work in De Horst, Dreibergen. In 1985 he obtained a Master's Degree *cum laude* in Comparative Religion from the Catholic University of Nijmegen. He took early retirement in 1990 and began an inquiry into the social dimension of the Buddha's Teaching. He was granted a Ph.D *cum laude* for his dissertation, "Magga, the Buddha's way to Human Liberation: A Socio-historical Approach", by the State University of Utrecht in 1997. That dissertation was revised and expanded in *The Buddha's Way to Human Liberation: A Socio-historical Approach*, published by the author in 1999 through a grant from the Asian Human Rights Commission. This text is a re-examination of some of the themes contained in that book.